HANDBOUND
AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO PRESS

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/nancystairnovel00laneuoft

(60) 9312 I

NANCY STAIR

NANCY STAIR

A NOVEL

By

Elinor Macartney Lane

Author of
"Mills of God."

Toronto, Canada
Poole Publishing Company, Limited
1906

PS
2199
L6N3

LIBRARY
MAY 10 1966
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

1073852

Entered according to Act of the Parliament of Canada, in the year one thousand nine hundred and six, by the Poole Publishing Company, Limited, Toronto, at the Department of Agriculture.

To **Frank Brett Noyes**
Who accepted, with a kind letter,
The first story I ever wrote,
This tale of **Nancy Stair** *is dedicated,*
As a tribute of affection,
From one old friend to another.

"For woman is not undeveloped man,
But diverse; could we make her as the man,
Sweet Love were slain: his dearest bond is this,
Not like to like, but like in difference."

TENNYSON

"Auld Nature swears, the lovely dears,
Her noblest work she classes, O,
Her 'prentice hand she tried on man,
And then she made the lasses, O."

ROBERT BURNS.

"Ye can't educate women as you can men. They're elemental creatures; and ye can no more change their natures than ye can stop fire from burning."

HUGH PITCAIRN.

PREFACE BY LORD STAIR

Two excellent accounts of the beautiful Nancy Stair have already been published; the first by Mrs. George Opie, in the Scots News, giving a detailed account of the work on the burnside, and a more recent one by Professor Erskine, of our own University, which is little more than a critical dissertation upon Nancy as a poet; the heart of the matter with him being to commend her English verses, as well as those in "gude braid Scot."

With these accounts to be secured so easily it may seem presumptuous, as well as superfluous, for me to undertake a third. I state at the outset, therefore, that it is beyond my ambition and my abilities to add a word to stories told so well. Nor do I purpose to mention either the work on the burn or Nancy's song-making, save when necessary for clearness.

For me, however, the life of Nancy Stair has a far deeper significance than that set forth by either of these gifted authors. My knowledge of her was naturally of the most intimate; I watched her grow from a wonderful child into a wonderful woman; and saw her, with a man's education, none but men for friends, and no counselings save from her own heart, solve most wisely for the race the problem put to every woman of gift; and with sweetest reasoning and no bitter renouncings enter the kingdom of great womanhood.

To tell this intimate side of her life with what skill I have is the chief purpose of my writing, but there are two other motives almost as strong. The first of these is to clear away the mystery of the murder which for so long clouded our lives at Stair. To do this there is no man in Scotland to-day so able as myself. It was I who bid the Duke to Stair; the quarrel which brought on the meeting fell directly beneath my eyes; I heard the shots and found the dead upon that fearful night, and afterward went blindfolded through the bitter business of the trial. I was the first, as well, to scent the truth at the bottom of the defense, and have in my possession, as I write, the confession which removed all doubt as to the manner in which the deed was committed.

The second reason is to set clear Nancy's relation to Robert Burns, of which too much has been made, and whose influence upon her and her writings has been grossly exaggerated. Her observation of natural genius in him changed her greatly, and I have tried to set this forth with clearness; but it affected her in a very different manner from that which her two famous biographers have told, and I have it from her own lips that it was because of the Burns episode that she stopped writing altogether.

If it be complained against me that the tale has my own life's story in it, I would answer to the charge that only a great and passionate first love could have produced a child like Nancy, and I believe that the world is ever a bit interested in the line of people whose loves and hates have produced a recognized genius. Then, too, the circumstances attending her birth had more influence on her after life than may at first be seen, giving me as they did such a tenderness for her that I have never been able to cross her in any matter whatever.

Much of the story, of which I was not directly a witness, comes from Nancy herself. I have sent the tale to Alexander Carmichael as well, and in all important matters his recollections accord with mine.

There came to me but yesterday, in this queer old city, a letter from him urging me back to Stair, closed with a stanza that was not born to die:

> "Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
> And never brought to min',
> Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
> And the days of Auld Lang Syne?"

They should not, Sandy, and none know it better than we; and I long for a grip of your hand, lad, and to feel the winds blow through the rowans at Stair and the copper birches of Arran; to hear the blackbirds whistle across the gowan-tops; to see the busy burn-folk through the break in the old south wall; and with the ending of these writings my steps are turned toward home.

Rome, 1801.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

I.—At Stair House, near Edinburgh, in 1768 . . 1

II.—I go on a cruise and find a hidden treasure . 15

III.—The treasure becomes mine, but is claimed by its owner 29

IV.—Enter Nancy Stair 41

V.—I make the acquaintance of a strange child . 53

VI.—Nancy begins her study of the law . . . 61

VII.—I take Nancy's education in hand . . . 74

VIII.- The daft days 86

IX.—Danvers becomes better acquainted with Nancy 105

X.—Nancy visits his Grace of Borthwicke . . 124

XI.—Danvers Carmichael makes a proposal . . 142

XII.—I meet a great man 159

XIII.—The duke visits Stair for the first time . 166

XIV.—Nancy meets her rival 174

XV.—Concerning Danvers Carmichael and his Grace of Borthwicke 185

XVI.—Nancy Stair arranges matters 204

XVII.—"The swap o' rhyming ware" 213

XVIII.—I go down to Mauchline 232

XIX.—The quarrel between Danvers and Nancy . 241

XX.—Danvers gives us a great surprise . . . 259

XXI.—The Allisons' ball and that which followed it 268

XXII.—A strange meeting 286

XXIII.—A false rumor causes trouble 298

XXIV.—The murder 307

XXV.—The trial 324

XXVI.—The defense 351

XXVII.—The mists all cleared away 361

NANCY STAIR

CHAPTER I

AT STAIR HOUSE, NEAR EDINBURGH, IN 1768

By reason of a breakneck ride through the Pentlands, I entered the dining-room at Stair very late one morning to find Huey MacGrath in a state of deepest gloom waiting to serve my breakfast.

"Good morning, Huey," I said, opening The Glasgow Sentinel which had come by the post.

"Good morning, my lord," he returned, in a grudging tone.

"It's a fine morning," said I.

"Ye think sae!" with a show of great surprise.

"Why, man!" I cried, "can not ye see for yourself?"

"We've the spring rains to come yet."

"They're by these ten days," I answered.

"Nae, nae," he said quietly. "That was jest the equinoctial, I'm thinking."

"The equinoctial comes in March, man!" I observed with some surprise.

"Tammas was telling me yesterday that the roads to London were fair unpassable."

"Nonsense," said I. "The summer's here, Huey."

"There's a chill at the gloamin', yet. Nae, nae," he went on earnestly, "simmer's far awa',—I've seen snaw's late's this!"

"Ye've had wonderful eyesight," I laughed, seeing the point toward which this talk was aimed. "And did ye hear nothing of tidal waves, Huey?" I asked; "with impassable roads to London, and snow in June, you've surely heard of some disasters by sea."

"Ah!" he cried, "ye can tell of what I'm thinking, for I've seen the signs of it in ye for a fortnight back. You're like your father before you, and your grandfather, as weel, for the curse of wandering seems to follow the name of Stair. With the first warm day ye have your windows wide open; and next your beds are into a draught fit to blaw ye from between the sheets; and then ye're up in the morning, aff on a hoorse scouring the hills as tho' ye were gyte; and at the end your valise's packed, the coach stopped, and ye aff amang the heathen, Gude alane kens wheer!

"Ah, laddie!" he continued, his voice changed to an affectionate wail, "dinna be gane awa'! Ye've niver seen Stair in the simmer time; but when the elderberries and lilacs flower on the burn; and the gilly flowers and hollyhocks are bloomin' by the north tower; when the wind blows soft through the rowans, and the pineys' pink and white faces, as big as cabbages, nod against the old south wall, there's no bonnier place in Scotland than your own place of Stair."

He was so moved at the thought of my leaving him, that I answered in some haste,

"In truth, Huey, I've no thought of going away."

"Ah," he answered, "ye don't know it, but ye have. It's been in ye for a week back,"—and casting his eye out of the window, "there's Mr. Carmichael now, riding in by the Holm gate. I'll jest open the door till him."

This was an entirely unnecessary attention on Huey's part, as Sandy Carmichael, whose estate of Arran Towers joins my own on the west, generally opened the door of Stair for himself, or the windows either, for the matter of that, if the latter were more convenient entrance from the place he happened to be.

My recollections of Sandy begin with my recollections of myself. As lads together, indeed before we were long out of skirts, we guddled for fish in the burn-water; went birds' nesting, raced our ponies, fought each other behind the stables and made a common stock of our money for the purchase of dimpies, peoys and jelly-tarts. We attended the High School together and upon leaving it chose the same college, where Sandy ran a merry pace, throwing his money out of the windows, as it were, and gaining for himself the reputation of wearing more waistcoats, drinking more whisky, making love to more women, and writing better verses, than any other man in the University.

He was a big, athletic, clean-limbed fellow, with brown hair, a bright face, warm eyes, and friendly genial ways which came from the kindest heart in the world. Five years before the time of which I write, which would be in 1763, he had married the Honorable Miss Llewellyn from the north, a pitiable pale-colored lady, who, half crazed by jealousy and ill health, was sending him back to unmarried ways again. Being only sister to Lord Glenmore, who had no heirs and was subject to seizures of a very malignant type, it was yearly expected that the title would come to Sandy's bit of a boy, a handsome-faced little fellow of four, who paid me long visits at self-selected times, demanding my watch, a pipe to smoke, and horses to ride.

Before Huey had time to reach the door, Sandy, in his riding clothes, with his cap on the back of his head, stood looking in at me. There was a scowl between his brows, and by this as well as other certain signs, I knew that all was not well with him.

"Will ye go on a cruise with me?" says he from the doorway with no introduction whatever.

"Would it be an unseemly prying into your affairs to ask where to?" I inquired with a smile.

"North or south," said he, still keeping his place by the door. "It's immaterial to me, so I escape accompanying my womenfolk to London."

"And if I go with ye," says I, "your wife will like me less than she does now."

"That would be impossible, so ye needn't worry over it," he returned dryly. "The only good word ye ever had from her was that if ye'd been a less handsome man ye might have been a better one."

"And even that could scarce be termed fulsome flattery," I observed.

"Will ye go?" he repeated, his mind set on the one point.

A sudden thought, bred of some news in the paper which I had just received, came to me upon the instant.

"Let us take the boat from Leith, and go north by the Orkney and Hebrides Islands, through the Minch to the west coast. There are all kinds of stories afloat concerning the gipsies and free traders who live in those deep coves; we might fall in with a pirate ship——"

"Or find a hidden treasure!" he said scoffingly, as he seated himself on the other side of the table and took some coffee, the frown gone, and the Sandy I knew with the bright face and laughing eye back again.

"Aye," he went on in his humorous way, "I am convinced 'twill be hidden treasure we'll find, Jock. We'll go ashore at midnight, and under a stunted pine will be a sailor's chest. Hidden treasures are always found in sailors' chests, ye know. And taking a three-foot bar of iron, which every gentleman in tales carries concealed upon his person, we, you and I,—none of the others, of course,—will pry this chest open—to find ducats and doubloons, and piastres, and sous-marquees—and a map of the Spanish Main and the Dry Tortugas—with crosses in blood. I'll tell you, ye can have my share of it now," he cried, laughing at me.

"Ye're over generous," says I, for jesting of this kind was a thing to which I was accustomed in him.

He dropped the raillery on the moment, however, to take a note-book from his pocket.

"Whom shall we ask?" he inquired in his natural voice.

Now I had one other friend, almost as dear to me as Sandy, named Hugh Pitcairn. But while there could be no doubt of the affection each had for me, there could be equally no doubt of the dislike they bore each other, this feeling having grown from the first day they met in the hockey grounds of the High School, where almost at sight of each other they fell to fighting, until finally pulled apart by some of the older lads.

"In this connection," said I, getting back at him a bit, for his jeering at my plans, "what do you think of Hugh Pitcairn?"

"In this connection," he returned dryly, "I do not think of Hugh Pitcairn at all."

"It's strange," I went on, in the same remote tone, as though it were a subject mentioned for the first time, "that ye should dislike him so."

"It can not match the strangeness of any one's enduring his society," he replied with heat.

"Well, well," said I, putting Pitcairn out of the talk. "What do you say to Geordie MacAllister?"

"The very man," he cried, writing the name in the book.

"And Graham Annesley," I went on.

"Good again."

"And Donald McDonald."

"He won't do at all!" Sandy broke out in a determined way. "He's gone the way of all trouble, which is the way of women. He's crazed about the Lady Mary Llewellyn and we'll have no one along who is sighing for a woman, be she his own or another man's wife. That's what I like in you, Jock Stair," he said, gazing at me with approval. "Ye've your faults——"

"No?" I said, with pretended amazement.

"Ye'd gamble on the flight of angels——"

"Ye're speaking of some one else, maybe," I suggested.

"And ye drink more than ye should,—but you're my own man where the women are concerned; for never since I knew ye,—and that's ever since ye were born,—have I seen ye look with wanting at maid, wife, or widow, and ye're wise in that," he added in a tone whose bitterness came from the unhappiness of his own wedded life.

To put the talk into a brighter channel, I hastened to suggest a fourth and fifth companion for the cruise, upon which we fell to passing judgment on the companionable men of our acquaintance, weighing their congeniality to us and to each other until one o'clock was past before we set about the business of delivering our invitations.

Offering to accompany Sandy on these errands, I thought I heard a groan, and on leaving the dining-room I made sure of another, and on the instant knew that they came from Huey MacGrath.

This expedition falling so quickly on the heels of his warning was an odd occurrence and for some reason, perhaps in remembrance of my recent assertion that I had no heart to leave Stair, there fell a funny performance between us. He handed me my cap and coat, determined to catch my eye, and I, having no desire to see the reproach which his glance contained, was equally set to avoid it; so that I received my cap with my eyes on my boots, my gloves with an averted head, and my riding-stick looking out of the doorway, and mounted my horse with no small resentment in my breast at this surveillance from a servant which would never be borne in any spot outside of Scotland.

"I'm thinking," said I to Sandy as we rode toward the town gate, "I'm thinking of discharging Huey when I come back."

"That will make the fifty-third time," said Sandy, with a grin, as he started his horse off at a gallop.

After the visits with Sandy, I kept an engagement with Hugh Pitcairn at the Star and

Garter, just around the corner from the Tron Church, at four o'clock of the same day. It was a few minutes past the hour as I neared the place, to find him standing by the doorway, his back to the passers by, a French cap pulled low over his eyes, reading from a ponderous book which he was balancing with some difficulty against the door-rail.

"I hope I've not kept ye waiting!" said I.

"Ye have kept me waiting," he answered, but with no resentment.

"I've been seeing some men about a cruise, and it took more time than I thought," I explained by way of apology.

"You're off on a cruise?" he asked, as we seated ourselves at one of the tables.

I nodded.

"With the Carmichael fellow, I suppose?" he asked.

"I am going with Mr. Carmichael," said I.

"Well, it's just *no* thing for you to be doing at all," he returned; "you should stay at home and look after your affairs. The Carlyles have broken the entail, and you may be able to buy the land on the other side of Burnwater that you've been wanting so long."

"And why can't you attend to the matter?" I cried. "Ye handle all my business, and do it far better than I ever could, beside, I can leave procuration——"

He smiled at this in an exasperatingly superior way as though I had used the word loosely, and went on: "The estate itself is to be looked to," and here he seemed to have learned his lesson out of Huey MacGrath's book.

"As for the house," I broke in, "it's taken better care of in my absence than when I am in it; and it's money in my pocket to leave matters with MacGrath to manage. I can not see," I said with some heat, perhaps helped by the brandy I was drinking, "why in heaven's name I shouldn't go on a cruise if I desire to! If I'd ties of any kind, a wife or children——"

This was Pitcairn's chance, and he broke my talk to take it.

"Your friend Carmichael has both, and to them his first duty lies." And any one with his wits about him can imagine the rest of the talk, for he fell into an attitude of strong disapproval of the whole plan; stating in a cold legal way that Sandy had already let me in for more than one trouble; had caused me to spend large sums of money, foolishly doing the like himself; that we were both incapable of good husbandry; given to drinking more than was wise, and over fond of the society of persons whom we were pleased to call men of talent, but who were, by his judgment, doggerel-making people, of loose morals, with no respect for fact, the conduct which became the general, or the laws of Christ.

He went over for the twentieth time Sandy's arrest for pulling off most of the door-knockers in Edinburgh; this event having occurred when the lad was but sixteen and home for the vacation; as well as the scandal of his having bid the Lord President in a high and excited voice to stick his head out of the window, and upon that venerable gentleman complying, shouting: "Now stick it in again!"

At the end of this discourse he invited me to remain at home with him and spend the evenings over a new treatise on the Laws of Evidence which he had just brought from the University, at which I laughed in his face and told him that I had neither the wit nor the inclination for such an enterprise. His last words were to the effect that there would be trouble bred of the expedition, and he closed his harangue in the following manner, as we stood on the South Bridge, where our ways parted:

"The Carmichael man has no judgment either for your affairs or his own. His heart may be all right, but he's got no common sense, and a man like that is little better than a fool."

CHAPTER II

I GO ON A CRUISE AND FIND A HIDDEN TREASURE

In spite of Hugh Pitcairn we were off the following Monday, going out of Leith, with a clear sky, a stiff breeze, and six men of our own feather, caring little where our destination lay, if the cards turned well, the drink held plenty, and the ocean rolled beneath us. North we went; north till the sea itself seemed quieter and lonelier; north where the twilight held far into the night, to be back by two of the morning; north by John o' Groats and the Pentland Skerries; till one June day found us turned far down the wild west coast; a colorless cruise behind us, with never a storm, a pirate ship, nor a sight of the jolly roger.

At the end of the day of which I speak we were lying in toward shore, and I was aft with a pipe for company, when Sandy came from behind the pile of sail-cloth against which I sat to say that the brig would have to lay by for repairs and to inquire what I thought of going ashore for an adventure.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"Somewhere above Landgore. 'Tis the very place for treasure," he added, with a laugh.

"There's nothing would suit me better than a night ashore," said I with truth, for I had had enough of the drink, the slack language, and the rough sea life, and looked forward to the land with a pleasant hurry of thoughts.

The moon shone bright in a sky of plain dark blue, making a path of swaying gold toward the beach, where we could see the water curl upon the sands like suds. A little back was a steep rise of granite rocks, with gorse and heather growing on the sides, at the bottom of which some gipsies, or free-traders, had built a great fire, and we heard them singing a drunken catch in chorus, and saw them whirling round and round the fire in a circle, as we stepped ashore from the boat.

An ugly silence fell as we approached them, and their women drew off, thinking that we were government men, no doubt; but finding that we had no weightier business than to get some information as to our whereabouts, one of them gave us word that the path up the cliff led to the Cuckoo Tavern, kept by Mother Dickenson, where we could obtain what refreshment we needed as well as lodgment for the night. We had gone some fifty feet when one of the men cried after us:

"An' if luck's wi' ye, ye may have a glyff of the handsomest lass in Scotland," at which a woman cuffed him with a ringing sound. There followed a muttered curse and a roar of laughter, which was the last we had of them.

The path up the cliff twisted and roved in such a manner to avoid the many boulders that the inn-light proved little better than a will-o'-the-wisp to guide us, and it was in a breathless condition that we reached the quaint low house, which was both neat and comfortable, seeming peculiarly so perhaps after our long voyage.

A queer old woman, with a humorous wry face, yellow and deeply lined, sharp black eyes, and a ready manner, stood behind a small bar and took note of us upon our entrance, with the air of one well able to judge our rank and bearing.

The rest went off with her to inspect the chambers which she was able to offer, laughing and chaffing each other as was their way, leaving me alone in the main room with my back to the fire. As I stood thus I heard a sudden noise, saw the curtain of a door at the side raised, and a girl in a black robe with a lighted candle in her hand looked in at me.

For twenty-seven years I had waited for a sight of that girl!

She was tall and slight, and carried herself with the careless grace of a child; her hair was of a bronze color, parted over the brows and rippling back into a great knot low on the head; her skin was cream, with a faint, steady pink burning in the cheeks, but as is the way of men, it was the eyes and lips I noted most; eyes of gray, filled with poetry and passion; eyes which looked out under brows black and heavy and between lashes, curled and long, giving a peculiar significance to the glance. The lips were scarlet, the upper one being noticeably short and full; lips mutable and inviting, lips that were made for mine—and all this I knew in the first minute that our eyes met, when, as it seemed to me, our two souls rushed together.

At gaze with each other we stood, no word spoken between us, for a full minute of time, when the noise of the men coming back disturbed her; she dropped the curtain and the light of her candle disappeared, a little at a time, as though she were walking from me down some long passage-way.

I do not know how love comes to other natures than my own, and men of notable integrity have told me how leisurely they strolled into the condition of loving; but for me, by one questioning glance from a pair of eyes, half gray, half blue, I was sunk fathoms deep in love, in love that knows nothing, cares for nothing but the one beloved. Soul and body I was signed, sealed, and delivered, "hers," in that first sight I had of her in the doorway with the candle in her hand and the crimson curtain framing her as if she were a picture.

We had supper, of which I ate nothing; liquor, of which I drank nothing; and merry talk, in which I took no part, Sandy jeering at me for a dull ass, I remember, and pretending regret at not having asked the Reverend Slowboy in my place; but his talk was of no moment to me, for my pulse was going like a trip-hammer, my brain reeled with that headiest wine of Nature's brewing, and I wanted to get out under the stars and be alone.

Having some skill at singing, Geordie MacAllister urged that I recall the catch we had heard on the beach; but finding me adamant against such an exhibition, Dame Dickenson offered a suggestion for our entertainment.

" There's a ward of mine here, a young lady, who has the music, and, seeing ye're all gentlemen, might be urged to a song."

Five minutes from the time that she was seated with us, I had heard her voice, our eyes had held each other again, and I saw a carnation flush bloom suddenly in her cheek as our hands touched. She brought with her a curious old instrument, like a lute with many strings, and upon this she struck chords to the song she sang, " The Wronged Love of Great Laird Gregory," the melody of which seems ever to be with me; and yesterday, when I heard Nancy crooning it to herself, I cried aloud as a woman might, for the unfulfilled in all our lives, and my dead youth, and Marian Ingarrach.

And at her singing, the four of us—or five it may be, for I can not now rightly recall whether Sawney MacAllister came ashore that night or not—sat before her beauty as though it were a part of witchery, for there was a bookish strangeness to it that on this wild coast, in a nest of smugglers and free-traders, after a cruise of rough living and deep drinking, we should be listening to the voice of a girl whose beauty was upsetting to the senses of man and whose bearing denoted breeding of the highest order.

She left us after a second singing, bidding us good-night in a laughing, friendly fashion, and looking at every one, save me, full in the eyes, as a child might have done; but when her hand touched mine, her eyes fell before me, and I, who knew something of woman's ways, felt with a leaping heart that she knew.

The rest were gone from the room when Sandy Carmichael, who had made the pretense of another pipe, came back to me as I stood looking into the fire.

"You saw her first!" he said.

"Aye," I answered, "and it's all over with me!"

"Is it to the church door?" he asked.

"It's to the foot of the Throne itself," I answered. "It's wherever she leads," for I was young and phrase-making was in the blood.

"Well," he says, "ye're Lord Stair, and if ye choose to marry a gips——"

"Choose!" I cried. "I have no choice. The men who stand balancing as to whether they will or they won't, with 'Would it be wise?' or 'Acceptable to the world?' I have no knowledge of, and want none, as I have told you often."

"Well," said he, "I've always called you crazy, Jock Stair," and here he put his hand lovingly on my shoulder, "but I never discovered until to-night how crazy you are. I'm not denying there's something fine about it; but is it sensible? Think o' Pitcairn," he said, with a laughing devil in his eye.

"Pitcairn may go to perdition," I answered with some heat.

"It's not Pitcairn that's on his way there, I'm thinking," he returned, with a droll look; "but we must all learn by experience, so gang your own gate. We're off at five in the morning. Do you go?"

He saw by my manner that nothing save an earthquake could get me from the house, and whistling, with some significance, "The Deil Has Nae Got all the Fools," he left me without a good-by word. After he had gone I went forth into the open to be alone. The stars were shining brightly through white clouds, which the sea winds drove across the sky, and far down the cliff I could see the great beach fire and catch the laughter and song of the gipsy folk and free-traders.

Tales were not wanting of the men of Stair who had lost their wits when crossed in love; who had run away with other men's wives and had abided with some jauntiness the world's dispraise, cleaving until death did them part to the one woman who seemed God-made for them. I had thought before this, in a slighting manner, of the strange doings of my forebears; but the thing was upon me, and, come life, come death, I knew that there was henceforward for me but one woman in the world, Marian Ingarrach, an Irish gipsy-girl, with a beauty beyond the natural, and a voice of music like the sounding of an old harp.

I stood under the great tree, the blood of a man and a lover pulsing sweet and feverishly through my veins, when I saw her come out on the balcony, over the sea door, where some posies grew, which she had come to move back from the wind. I was not one to lose an opportunity like this, for nature in me was strong and impulse-driven. I crossed the space which divided us and spoke up to her.

"Will you come down?" I called to her; "I have that which I would say to you tonight."

She started at the sound of my voice, hesitated for a moment, and with no answer in words disappeared from the porch, coming out of the door near which I stood.

Her hair, in two long plaits, hung almost to her knees, and by the moonlight I could see the flush of her cheek and the silver sheen of her eyes as she looked up at me with questioning in her glance, and I remember now the clutch at my throat which seemed to hold back all I would say, as I took off my cap and stood before her.

"I love you," I said headily, "I love you, and I want you for my wife," and, seeing the highness of the absurdity that my first words to her should be a proposal of marriage, I cried,

"Oh, my dear! my dear! ye'll think me daft to talk thus; but we men of Stair go gyte in these affairs. 'Tis love at first sight with us, or none at all; but if ye'll have me, I'll make ye Lady Stair; and what's far more, I'll try to make you a happy woman the rest of your days.

"It seems wild enough for me to be talking so," I went on, "to you, who do not even know my name," and here she interrupted me with a shy smile.

"Jock!" she said, reaching forth her hand, and the door of heaven opened, as it seemed.

"How did you know?" I asked.

"Sure," she said, "I listened for it. The other big man called you that."

"You cared to know?" I whispered, for my arm was around her by this time, and the world had slipped away.

"Very much."

"And you think you could learn to love me, Marian?"

I felt the little body quiver in my arms, and when she spoke there was fear in her voice.

"Do you think it is right?" she asked. "Do you think it can be right? It seems as though for years, for all my life, I had waited for your coming, and I loved you the minute I saw you —you whom a few hours agone I did not know to be a living man. Tell me," she went on excitedly, "you who are a man and of the world, can this be all good?"

"It is as God meant such things to fall," I answered her, "and He deal so with me as I shall deal with thee."

"But," she persisted, "are you sure you understand? You tell me you are Lord of Stair, and I've no doubt of it, for truth shines from your eyes; but what do you ken of me? I who have no name, who was left by some gipsy folk at the inn door, and whose breeding —what I've of it—came from a Jacobite priest who teaches by the Cairn Mills."

There was never another voice so full of music, so caressing or so feminine, as Marian Ingarrach's, none, not even Nancy Stair's; and as she uttered these depreciations of herself, I exclaimed:

"You are as I would have you."

"Entirely?"

"Entirely."

"And you'll not be ashamed of me?"

It was in this question that I had her first teasing of me, for she was woman, and knew as well as I of the beauty, which gave her a queen's right to the hearts of men.

"Ashamed of you," I cried. "Ah, girl, dinna ye see I canna get my breath for wantin' ye?"

She stood looking at me, her chin well up and an amused and a glad look in her eyes.

"Ah," she said at length, "you are the one who is worth all that a woman has to give, and the blood of all the lawless folk of which I come speaks for you, Jock Stair! For ye woo as a man should woo; and I'm won as a woman should be won, because she has no will left to choose."

And she turned her face toward mine.

"I'm just yours for the asking, Jock."

I drew her to me, and we kissed each other beneath the starlit blue, with the sea wind blowing our hair and the gipsy singing coming, in broken bits of melody, up through the gorse and heather.

I made a song of it after, in my limping verse, which Nancy found one day, and laughed at, I remember:

> The gipsies are out, I can see their lights moving,
> Race answers to race, 'neath the stars and the blue;
> They are living and laughing and mating and loving,
> As I stand in the midnight with you, love, with you!

CHAPTER III

THE TREASURE BECOMES MINE, BUT IS CLAIMED BY ITS OWNER

There was no sleep for me that night, and I lay awake till the clear day, watching the gulls fly across the window and waiting the time when I might see her once again. Early as it was when I arose, the wee bit lassie who brought me the hot water said in answer to my inquiry that the other gentlemen had been gone since the daybreak, and declining her offer of breakfasting in my room, I went down to the spence, hoping that Marian might be there before me. I found the room empty, however, save for Dame Dickenson, who had spread a table for me between the fire and the window, through which I could see the waves curl on the lower beach and the sunshine break into flying sparks over the fine blue sea. I was never one to mince words when there was aught to be said, nor to put off settling until another time a thing which could be fixed upon the moment.

"Sit ye down," I said to the little body, who was plainly of a rank and comprehension above the vulgar. "Sit ye down! There are a few words that I would like to have with ye."

She remained standing, but paused in her employ to give me a wordless attention as I went on:

"I am John Stair, Lord of Stair and Alton in the Mearns, and I want to marry your ward, Marian Ingarrach."

She set the rest of the dishes before me as though not hearing my speech, but I saw the corners of her mouth twitch a bit and, after removing the cover of the haddie, she cast a glance over the top of my head rather than directly at me, as she said:

"Ye're a cautious body, Lord Stair."

"I know what I intend to do," I answered, and there was a silence between us for a space.

"Ye're a quare man," she broke forth presently, looking at me humorously over her glasses. "Aye, a quare man! Ye come here with a pack of riotous livers from Edinburgh, clap your eyes on my young lady for the first time last night, and are for marryin' her off hand this morning with no more to do over it than if marryin' was a daily performance of yours."

I said no words, but regarded her with a smile.

"Sure," she went on, looking at me with great equanimity, "ye canna soften my heart by your smilin'. Ye're a handsome man, my lord, and ye've the strong way with ye that black men often have; but I've met in with handsome men afore now, and the handsomer the more to be feared. Dickenson was a dark man himself," she added, with a twinkle in her eye. Another silence fell between us, as I watched her needles click in and out and catch the firelight.

"Perhaps," she said presently, "ye'd like to have a little knowledge of the girl you're wantin' for a wife."

"It's the matter which lies nearest my heart at the moment," I answered her; and at this her voice and face became more serious, and she stopped her knitting, looking directly at me as she spoke.

"There's little to tell," she began, "little that I could take book-oath to, I mean, for one bad night in March, eighteen years back, I heard a wail at the door, and opening it found a gipsy-hamper with the baby inside. She was finely dressed and there was a note pinned on her little shirt, which—wait a bit," she said, "I can show it ye." At this she crossed the room to a wooden cupboard, unlocked the door, and took from it a small box, the key of which she had in her bosom. Opening this she handed me a slip of paper, upon which was written, in a coarse male hand:

"HARRIET DICKENSON:

"If you will keep the child money will be sent for you and her. I want her brought up a lady."

"There was a roll of gold in the basket with her, forty pounds, my lord. And the writer has kept his word. Money has been sent ever since, sometimes from Italy, once from Russia, and then from the Far East. That is all that I know."

"But you have beliefs concerning the matter?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, "though the truth of them could not be proved. Twenty years ago, when I was maid at Squire Eglinton's, on the Irish coast, near Carrickfergus, he had one daughter, a flower of a girl, who ran away with a gipsy man she met in her father's park. The young lady loved me and knew where my home in Scotland was. I have thought, my lord, that mayhap she died, and 'twas the father-man who brought the baby to my door. I have told you all but this: if Miss Eileen ever had a daughter, it could not be more like her than Marian is."

A hundred questions came to me at once, but before one of them was asked I had a sight of the girl herself, coming from the country side of the house, the wind blowing her hair about her face and carrying away swarms of white petals from the hawthorn-blooms she held in her arms. As she was hid from my sight by the corner of the house, Sandy Carmichael entered the room, his hands thrust far into his pockets, and his pipe held at a curious angle between his teeth.

"What!" I cried in amazement. "You here! I thought you were gone at daylight."

"Did ye now?" he asked, with raillery in his voice. "Did ye think," and he put his hand on my shoulder after his own fashion, "did you think I'd leave you, Jock, in this, your last extremity? Ye're not married yet?" he went on jokingly, "I'm not too late for the wedding? Oh," he broke out with a laugh, "how have the mighty fallen!"

"Not yet," I answered him; "but it will be no fault of mine if I'm not a married man by night."

He changed color at this, and getting the dame on his side the two of them urged a waiting—I know not for what; and more thought, which would have brought me to the same conclusion; but their talk and their arguments went high over my head, for I was fixed as fate that nothing but Marian's mind against it could move me from the wish I had. As the three of us stood thus, the talk going back and forth, the girl came into the room, and at sight of me went white, changing on the instant to a glorious pink, which flushed her face all over like a rose.

"Good morning, Lord Stair," she said.

I crossed the room, and took her hand and kissed it.

"Marian," I said, "will you marry me today?"

She sent a hurried look around the three of us, and as a woman discovers things, knew that they were against me in the matter. It took her not one second to decide for me, and my being leaped toward her as she spoke.

"When you will, my lord," she said. "I have no wishes that are not your own."

It was a little past noon of the same day, with none to see save Sandy Carmichael, Dame Dickenson, and Uncle Ben, that Father Pierre, from the Cairn Mills, made Marian and myself one in a marriage such as the gods intended when the world was young and the age of gold.

About three o'clock Sandy left us, going on horse to join his party, which was to lay by for him at Landgore. Marian and I walked with him far beyond the sea light, he leading his horse and telling us that it was but the strong remembrance that he had a wife at home which prevented his carrying her away with him. He had great joy in my happiness, and his strong laugh rolled round and round in echoes among the rocks as we went along together. Before we parted his mood changed a bit, and he turned suddenly and laid his arm across my shoulder.

"You'll not forget me, laddie?" he said

earnestly, with his head turned a bit from me so that his eyes could not be seen.

Our hands gripped each other at the end, as though we could not speak the word of good-by, and my dear, who knew the thought—that my marriage might in some way make the friendship between us less close—took our locked hands between her little ones and held them to her breast.

"Believe me," she said, as though making a vow, "that all I can ever do to make this friendship stronger I shall do; oh, believe me in that!"

Sandy kissed her on the cheek, she stuck a piece of pink heather in his coat, and he mounted his horse and was off at a bolt. Twice we saw him turn and wave his cap toward us; we called to him, and he shouted back something in return, the meaning of which we were unable to discover, and so went down a sudden turn of the rocks and was lost to sight.

. . . . .

There are some parts of every life that can not be set forth. The first sacred months of my marriage are of these. The little inn, which was no longer in Dame Dickenson's possession, I purchased, and we made it into a home. And the time is all of Marian! Marian standing in white in the going down of the braeside to welcome me; Marian on my knee in the twilight looking out seaward and starward; Marian with her brown head and face, such as the angels have, resting on my breast in the gold of the dawning; Marian—Marian—Marian—I, an old man, who was once that bonny Jock Stair, all your own, call to you. Can you come? Will it ever be again? See! I stretch my hands, wrinkled, old, to that far off blue, and ask you, as I have a thousand times, to send me peace.

. . . . .

All that summer we lived in the little house, and toward autumn there were reasons why my wife should not be troubled with new cares. Sandy came to see us frequently; whiles I ran up to Edinburgh to tend to needful matters. One day in March, because of some wish my dear had half expressed, I went to town to get some of the jewels with which the Ladies Stair had adorned themselves in days gone by. I had promised a short absence, but there was a matter of some fastenings to be mended at the goldsmith's, and my stay was three days. Riding backward as fast as a postboy, I came on the porch suddenly to find a weeper, as if one were dead, hanging upon the knocker. Dropping the box and riding-whip I pushed the door ajar with a great shove and entered, upon Dame Dickenson, who was coming out of her room, from which place I heard a faint cry. Her eyes were red with weeping; she looked scared and went white at the sight of me, and with a horrid presentiment of trouble, I cried on the instant, in a voice which I heard myself as coming from some other:

"Where is she?"

"Oh, my lord," she said, and her voice broke and went off into a shriek, "did ye no meet wi' Mr. Carmichael? He's gone for ye."

"I met nobody," I cried, and again there was a tiny wail as of a new-born babe from the next room.

"Oh, my lord!" she cried again, springing forward and putting herself between me and the doorway which I made to enter. "Ask God for strength to bear what's been sent ye. Say a prayer, my lord. Ask Him to let ye remember the baby that's come to you. Pray, O my lord," she cried; "prepare yourself."

I pushed her from me and threw the door wide open.

There was a body in the room laid out for burial, with candles burning at the head and foot—a slim, young, girlish body; and as Father Pierre, who was kneeling by it, turned his face toward mine I knew that Marian, because of me, had gone forever. Something seemed to strike me at the back of the head and a black vapor fell before my eyes and stopped my breath—I knew that Father Pierre caught me in his arms, a merciful unconsciousness seized me, and everything faded away.

• • • • •

When I came to myself I was in my own sleeping-room at Stair, a night-light burning on the table, and some one on the other side of the screen sat reading by the fire. I saw the top of the head over the chair-rail, and knew it was Sandy Carmichael's. Five weeks longer I lay there, and on toward midsummer, my fever having lasted four months, Sandy proposed I should start as soon as I was able and tour the world. It had been an old dream of mine, but with little taste for life, I set sail from Glasgow for Gibraltar some time in August, 1769, to visit other lands and see new lives with old sorrows like my own.

CHAPTER IV

ENTER NANCY STAIR

I HAD been from Scotland near five years, when two letters were handed to me as I sat in The British Sailors' Tavern, in Calcutta; one of which was from Hugh Pitcairn and the other from Sandy Carmichael. I thought as I read them what characteristic epistles they were, for Hugh's read as though I had parted from him but the day before, and urged my return to look after some land interest which he as my solicitor felt should have my immediate supervision.

"There is another thing," he added, "which should bring you home. Huey MacGrath is ailing and I fear is sickening to die."

Sandy spoke, as was his way, of our old affection and his wish to see me once again, and he ended by a tender reference to the baby of mine who was growing a big girl and needed me, he said.

God knows how lonely I was when these two letters came to me, and the thoughts of home and a child dependent upon me brought, for the first time since my dread trouble, a sense of comfort. Huey sick unto death was another call to my heart, and in four days' time I was homeward bound.

Before I stepped ashore at Leith it was Sandy who waved to me from the quay; Sandy whose hand gripped mine so hard the fingers ached for days; Sandy whose eyes beamed with joy as he looked at me and took me back to Stair.

"I've been living on the docks awaiting your return until the town doubtless thinks I'm going for a sailor," he cried. "Well, it's good to have you back, Jock Stair—and I believe that Huey MacGrath's illness is little more than a longing for the sight of you."

On our ride homeward his whole talk turned about his boy Danvers, of whom he spoke with unfettered approval and satisfaction, which came from a strange source.

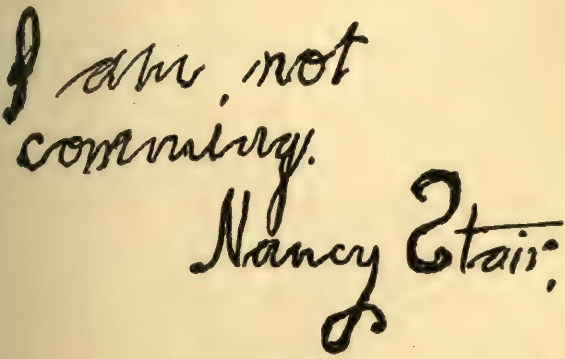
"He looks like you, Jock Stair! It's heaven's truth that he's the image of you! It seems odd that I, who am a brown man, should have a son with an olive skin and hair like ink, but it's a fact. And he's like ye in other ways, for he rides like a monkey and can thrash any one of his weight in the county. Aye," he concluded, "ye'll be proud of Danvers!"

"And what of my girl?" I asked.

"Nancy," he said, a curious look coming into his face as he smiled; "she's one you must see to judge of for yourself. I've raised her up as well as I could. I've spent time with her!"

His determined reticence, which had some humor in it, put me on my metal concerning the child, and the day after my arrival I sent Tam MacColl with a written request to Dame Dickenson to fetch the little one immediately to Stair.

Six days later Tam returned bringing a large sheet of paper, which I have before me as I write. It was folded after a curious fashion, with no address, and opening it I found the following:



I am not
comming.
Nancy Stair.

For the first time in five years I laughed aloud. This was something worth. Here was an atom, not yet five, who took her pen in hand and misspelled her firm intention to do as she chose. I folded the paper and laid it aside, wondering what kind of offspring I had begotten, and the following morning took horse to Landgore to see this very determined little body for myself.

As I came in sight of the place after my long ride, strange voices called to me from the sea, from the heather, from the great copper birch over the house. Eyes long dead seemed looking into mine, hands were on my hair, and there came to me, with the feeling of mortal sickness, the terrible, sweet remembrances of an early passion and of things to be known to none save Marian and me and the One who does most wisely for the Great End, but bitterly to us who see but a little of the way.

Reaching the porch, my strength left me utterly, and I leaned against one of the wooden pillars for support. Standing thus, I saw a child running down the braeside at the top of her speed, with no knowledge of my presence, but coming at her fastest to reach the house.

She wore a short-waisted black frock, with a very long skirt, which almost touched the ground. On her feet were red shoes, which twinkled in and out of the black, as with great great dexterity and lightness, she clambered up the steps of the porch and stood before me, one of the miracles of God before which we human folk stand abashed. For here was Marian again. Marian to the turn of an eyelash; to the finger tips; in the bronze chestnut curls which stood like a halo round the face; in the supple little woman-body; in all the dear, quaint, beautiful baby who stood before me devouring me with gray eyes, and looking at me with a radiant, shy smile as she held a kitten tail up against her breast.

After a few seconds' regard of me, during which I could see by her face that she was piecing some bits of knowledge together, she clapped her hands.

"Jock!" she cried, with a rapturous smile.

I can never tell the joy and horror of the moment, for my name was the first word my beloved had ever spoken to me, and at the sound of it from this, her child, my heart leaped into my throat; there came a whirring in the top of my head and a singing in my ears, and as I sank upon the old stone settle something like a moan escaped me.

In the next minute I knew Nancy Stair for all time. The sight of suffering seemed to put her past herself, and, dashing toward me, she climbed up on the seat. I could feel the warmth of her body and the clinging of her dimpled arm as she drew my head against her naked, palpitating little breast as though to defend me from suffering against the whole world.

"Oh, you poor fing!" she cried. "You poor fing! Does you hurt?"

When I had in some degree recovered my self-control, the child sat down beside me, so close that she pushed her small body against mine, with one rose-leaf of a hand laid upon my knee in a protective fashion, every little while giving me a pat, as a mother soothes a child.

Sitting thus, my arm around her, my soul stirred to its depths, my eyes brooded over all her baby charms.

She was of a slender, round figure, with dimpled neck and arms. Her head was broad, her forehead low, with noticeably black brows, and she had a way, when perplexed, I very soon discovered, of drawing these together, the right one falling a bit lower than the left. It was the eyes which struck one first, however; brooding, passionate, observant, quick to look within or without, and fearless in their glance. Mrs. Opie states that they were black, and Reynolds painted them bright blue; but the truth is, that they were like her mother's, clear gray, with pupils of unusual size, and heavy lashed, especially on the under lid.

She was still under five, but I had not been with her a quarter of an hour before I recognized a potent and wonderful personality and knew that there was something which this small soul had in her keeping to give the world which others have not.

"Sandy was here," I heard her sweet voice saying when I had recovered myself. "Sandy was nere one day. He fetched the drey hen you sent me." Here she patted my knee, looking up as though to assure me of her protection.

"He said the rabbits were from you," she went on; "and the owl got broke that was in the box. It was too little for him."

"Sandy brought me," she said finally, "the child that stares so," and she pointed, her eyebrows puckered together, at a rag-doll, with painted cheeks and round, offensive eyes, sitting head down in a corner of the porch.

Beyond money, I had not sent even a message to the child in all these years of absence, and my heart filled with gratitude to that friend who had made me a fairy-grandfather and won a child's love for me, who was so unthoughtful and so far away.

As we sat thus, Dame Dickenson heard the sound of voices, and came from the house to welcome me with a smile, though the tears were in her eyes as she spoke her words of welcome.

Her life of ease and freedom from money-care had changed her greatly, and with her black silk frock, her lace kerchief and cap, she seemed quite like some old gentlewoman. I tried, knowing the inadequacy of words, even while speaking, to thank her for my wonderful child, when she interrupted me.

"I should have died but for her—after"—she broke off here, not wishing to name the sorrow between us. "But you've not seen the wonder of her yet; she has the whole Cairn Mills bewitched, and if she were a queen on her throne could not have her way more than she does now."

It was of a piece with the Dame's thoughtfulness to have prepared for me a room which I had never known, and where no memories dwelt; a low-raftered apartment on the landside of the house, with a window looking over the garden and a fire burning cheerily in the corner chimney. Dropping off to sleep, happier than I thought it possible for me to be again, I became aware that there was some one in the room with me. Opening my eyes, I found Nancy, with her long white gown gathered on her breast to keep it from the floor, standing looking at me, her head about level with my own as it lay on the pillow.

"What is it?" I asked.

"*GetinwifJock,*" she answered.

"What?" I inquired again, for she had slipped her words all together.

"Get—in—wif—Jock," she repeated, with an unmistakable movement of her small hand to turn back the bed covers.

"You darling!" I cried, and drew her in beside me.

The tenderness I felt for her as she lay on my breast was akin to agony. I trembled at the touch of her, and what she meant to me, and all that I had missed. And long after she fell asleep, I lay, seeing the past with new eyes, understanding new truths, and making myself, please God, a better man.

I woke the next morning about eight, to find her gone, but as I was dressing by the window I saw her below me in the garden, busy with some hens that were clucking all about her.

"Hello, Little Flower," I called to her.*

She smiled up at me, blinking in the strong sunshine, and I hastened down to join her.

"Are you willing to come back with me to Stair?" I asked.

"We're getting ready, Jock," she answered, putting her hand in mine.

"We?" I inquired. "Whom do you mean?"

"Nancy Stair," she said, touching herself on the breast with her small forefinger, "Dame Dickenson, Father Michel, Uncle Ben, the two or three dogs, the kittens, the one without a name, the drey hen, and the broken owl——"

---

*The name came to me with no thought, but for years it was the one she fancied most, and many of her early poems were signed L. F. S., or sometimes by nothing save a queer little drawing, half rose and half daisy.

(The manuscript of the "Maid with the Wistfu' Eye" in the Edinburgh collection has only this mark as signature.)

"Nancy Stair," I broke in, with some firmness in my voice, "it will be utterly impossible to take all these folk up to Stair Castle."

She looked at me and went white, as grown people do when news which chills the blood is suddenly brought to them, and struck her little hands together as though in pain. Turning suddenly she left me and trotted off through a cleft in the stone wall of the kitchen garden, to which place I followed her, with remorse in my heart for the rough way in which I had spoken.

I found her lying flat in the grass, her face hidden in her arms, her body trembling, but she made no sound.

"What is it, dear?" I asked.

"I can't go," she said, without looking up, "I can't go, Jock."

"Why?" I inquired.

She arose at this and leaned against me, her head but little above my knee and her eyes looking straight up into mine.

"Oh, don't you see?" she cried. "I can't go!—I can't go and leave my people, Jock!"

I can see now that then was the time I

should have been firm with her, and have escaped the tyranny of latter years. Firm with her! Firm! while Nancy stood leaning against me with her baby curls under my hand. Firm! with eyes that held tears in them, tears which I had caused.

"Take them," I cried, "take the free-traders, the old wreck, the Cairn Mills, and the new light-house, for all of me; but never let me see that look in your face again, my little one!" and I had her in my arms, as weak a father as I had been as lover and as husband, with the resulting that I, John Stair, Lord of Stair and Alton in the Mearns, in company with Dame Dickenson, Father Michel, Uncle Ben, the two or three dogs, the kittens, the Nameless One, the "drey hen," and a small child holding a dissipated-looking owl with but one whole feather in its tail, drove up to the gateway of Stair Castle in a gipsy wagon of an abandoned character, on the afternoon of a day in late February, in the year 1773.

CHAPTER V

I MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF A STRANGE CHILD

Several days after this strange home-coming some business called me to the far woods, where I was detained until the afternoon sun was well on its way behind the hills. Nearing the house I discovered Nancy huddled in a little bunch, sitting by her lee-lane in a spot of sunshine on the west steps—such a lovable, touchable little bundle as she sat there, with her chin in her hand. I looked for the exuberant welcome which I had always received, but it was wanting; and as I stood waiting some greeting from her, she made a quaint gesture of dismissal to me:

"Jock mustn't disturb Nancy now," she said; "Nancy's making verses." There was in the atom's voice nothing but a statement of her wishes. That I was her father and one to be obeyed never entered her curly head, and her tone implied the belief that I would respect her rights as she would mine. I can honestly state that I never was more dismayed in my life. I entered the library, wondering what had happened in my absence, and considering whether to send for Dickenson and make some inquiries.

It was gone a half hour perhaps before Nancy came in through the low window, and crossing the room to the place I sat, leaned herself against my knee.

"Listen," she said:

Jock Stair's gone away,
Where I cannot fancy.
Jock Stair's gone away,
Gone and left his Nancy

O, Jock, I cannot say
How much I miss you,
If you were here to-day
Nancy would kiss you.

Her cheeks were roses, her eyes shone with a misty light, and the verse so rapturous to herself that she struck her little hands together when she had finished.

"Do you like it, Jock? Is it pretty?" she asked.

"You blessed baby," I answered, "who taught you?"

"They *come*," she said, "and afterward Nancy's head-iks," and she put her morsel of a hand to her forehead, as a grown person with headache does.

"*Head-iks!*" she said again with emphasis.

The second day after this remarkable event, Sandy, who was riding by, called over the wall to me, as I stood with Nancy by my side.

"Well," he cried, "what do you think of my girl, Nancy Stair?"

"The same that you do yourself," I retorted. "Come in and lunch with us, won't you?"

He made no answer in words, but turning his horse toward the south gate, entered the policy, and I sent Nancy off to tell Kirstie that Mr. Carmichael would dine with us, for I thought it no right part of a child's rearing that she should hear herself discussed.

As she took her small body around the boxwood, lifting it up on the toes at every step—a way she had when pleased—"You've raised up a wonderful child for me, Sandy," I said, and I told him of the verses she writ the day before.

"Aye," he answered, "I didn't tell ye of them, for I wanted that ye should find out about her verses yourself. I've a book full of them, and she but five. But after all's said and done," he went on, "'tis the heart of her that's more wonderful than the head. Christmas a year back I was walking out with her, and some shiftless beggars got in the path and asked for money. 'In truth,' I answered, knowing what frauds they were, 'I haven't a penny in the world!' I thought the child had let the incident pass unnoticed, but that evening the door to my bedroom opened and Nancy, in her white nightgown, walked in. She came to the writing-table shyly, and after putting a large copper penny on the edge of the table, pushed it toward me with her forefinger.

"'You tan have it,' she said; 'I tan dit anover.'

"There it is, the copper penny," he cried, with a laugh, though there were tears in his eyes, showing me the end of his watch-fob from which the bit of money hung.

"The dear little thing had thought I really had not a penny in the world and had brought her only one to sacrifice upon the altar of our friendship. Oh, Jock Stair," and the union between us spoke in the words, "how are you and I to raise up a soul like this and keep it unspotted from the world?"

As I stated at the beginning of my story, I have no intention of saying a word of Nancy's charities or of her verse-making save when necessary for the clearness of my tale, but I find the time has now come when some mention of the first must be made. It could be judged from the anecdote already told, of her bringing "her people" to Stair, that she formed strong attachments; but as time went by I found that this affection extended to almost everything that lived. She was a lawless little body, going around the grounds at her own pleasure, and bringing back some living thing at every expedition to be cared for at the house. These findings included lame dogs, rabbits, cats, and finally she came into the library, breathless:

"I got a boy to-day, Jock," she said, exactly as I might have stated I had caught a fish. "A boy," she repeated, every feature in her face alight; "Father Michel's got him."

"For Heaven's sake, Nancy," I inquired, "what do you intend to do with him?"

"Keep him," she answered.

Going down with her to inspect this new treasure, I found a lad eight or ten years of age, very sickly, with a hump upon his back, and of a notably unprepossessing appearance, carrying a fiddle, and evidently forsaken by some strolling player. She had set her mind upon his staying, and he stayed; but finding the trouble her accumulated possessions were giving at Stair, she showed me within the week a bit of her power to get her own way; a thought which afterward bore such large results for the whole of Scotland.

The former lord, my honored father, had erected under some trees far off by the burn water several small stone houses for the servants which my beautiful Irish mother brought with her from her own country. Because my bachelor ways had needed little service these dwellings had gradually fallen into disuse and disrepair, the few serving people I required finding abundant lodgment in the attic chambers. These tiny houses, built of gray stone, with ivy growing around the windows, had taken Nancy's fancy from the instant her eyes first lighted on them.

The evening before her sixth birthday, as we stood together watching the sun go down, a thought for the following day came to me.

"And what do you want for your birthday, Little Flower?" I asked.

"The little houses," she said, leaning her head against me.

"What for?" I inquired, thinking perhaps that she believed them play houses.

"Dame Dickenson, Father Michel, Uncle Ben—" she stopped.

"To live in?" I inquired.

"To keep," she answered quietly.

The more I thought it over the more pleased I became with the idea that these devoted people, who gave their lives to Nancy, should be rewarded. I was perhaps especially pleased at the thought of doing something for Father Michel, of whom I would now be speaking.

He was at this time a young man, still under twenty-five, who had come, none knew from what place, to live at the Cairn Mills with the dear old priest who married Marian and me. What tragedy had been behind him none knew, but Dickenson told me that from the time he first saw the child his heart went out to her, and that after the meeting there was no keeping him from the old inn, where he finally took up his residence as one of the family.

Old Uncle Ben, whose sea tales were one of Nancy's chiefest joys, and whose wooden leg was her greatest perplexity, I felt deserved some recognition of his service, and, to shorten the telling, in less than a month these houses were occupied as Nancy had desired they should be—Father Michel being given the large one, with Nancy's dwarfed boy, Dame Dickenson the next, and Uncle Ben becoming the proud occupant of a third. It seemed a sort of child's play to me at first, and Mrs. Opie's statement that I built these houses at this period for the work on the Burnside, is entirely without foundation.

Some credit has been bestowed upon me as well for the working out of a labor problem here, but it is honor undeserved, for the thing began in the entirely unintentional manner which I have set down, and the working out of it came at a later date through Nancy's thinking and the zeal and goodness of Father Michel.*

---

* It was about this period that the "Lace School" was regularly begun, which occurred by no plan of mine, but in the following way: Sandy had had two young women from the north for house service at Arran, and finding them unused to labor, proposed that Dame Dickenson should teach them the Irish lace-making which she had learned in her own country. And in a short time there were nine or ten young girls of the neighborhood under regular instruction in this industry.

CHAPTER VI

NANCY BEGINS HER STUDY OF THE LAW

There has been some delay in bringing Hugh Pitcairn into my story, and, as I read that which I have written, I seem to have set him down in a scant and dry manner little calculated to do justice to his many virtues. These virtues, however, were of the kind which made him a fine citizen rather than a jolly companion over a bowl of brose. He was a tall man, heavily built, with a large face, thick bristly hair, and blue eyes set extraordinarily far apart. The bridge of his nose being noticeably low, this peculiarity gave the upper part of his face the appearance of being very sparsely settled. It was Robert Burns, I remember, who made this descriptive observe concerning him. A lowland body, but kin to the Pitcairns of the north, he had come to the High School dependent for his education upon the generosity of a rich uncle, and from the time he entered was easily first in all of his classes. Of an unbending rectitude, unmerciful in his judgments, analytical, penetrating, and accumulative, he was at an early age destined for two things—success and unpopularity. He left the High School with us, to enter upon the study of the law with Maxwell, of Dalgleish, and rising rapidly in his profession was at the age of thirty-three recognized as the soundest, most learned, and bitterest tongued lawyer in Auld Reekie.

Justice to his mind was a simple thing; a man had either broken the law or he had not; if he had, he should be punished. "Extenuating circumstances" was a phrase used only by the sentimental and the guilty. I recall, as I write, his telling me with some pride and an amused smile of a certain occasion, when he had wrung a verdict from a jury against their sympathies, that the spectators had hissed him on his way out of court.

"He's not a man at all. He's only a Head," Sandy Carmichael said of him once, and I find enough truth in the statement to make it worth setting down.

His conceit of himself was high, as is the case with many self-made men, but he had a fine code of conduct for the direction of his private affairs, was aggressively honest and fearless, and an earnest believer in God, himself, and the Scots law.

Like other great men he had his failings, however, and he set up to be a judge of music and poetry, for which he had as vile an ear as could be conceived; and to hear him read from Ramsay or Fergusson was an infliction not unnecessarily to be borne. One night, I remember, in '86, Burns and I stopped at Pitcairn's on our way home from Creech's and got him to read Leith Races and Caller Oysters, and Rab afterward went out and rolled over and over in a snow-drift, roaring with laughter, till some of the town-guard, who chanced to be going by, were for arresting him on the charge of drunkenness.

It may be easily judged from this description that my friend Sandy and he were at opposite poles from each other, as I have said, and as time passed this dislike increased until it became the chiefest vexation of my life. If I mentioned Hugh's name to Sandy, he would maintain a disdainful silence or turn the talk with abruptness; while if Sandy's name was spoken before Pitcairn, the great lawyer would raise his eyebrows, shrug his shoulders, or make some biting criticism which rendered me resentful and highly uncomfortable as well.

As soon as I was firmly fixed in my old home again, Pitcairn began to drop in on me, as his practise had been before my marriage, and his attitude to Nancy was a thing humorous to see. Hers to him was not without its droll side as well, for when he was present, especially if he talked of his cases, the child would sit on a stool, with some live thing held in her lap, literally devouring him with her eyes as he narrated the story of some criminal whom he had hanged or transported. I have seen her imitate his gesture as he talked, and sigh with relief when the jury handed in its verdict and the culprit's doom was finally settled. It was not long, however, before she evinced a strong dislike to being left alone with him, and if I had occasion to leave the room where the three of us were together she would invariably follow me.

In an unfortunate moment, driving by the old court in a pony chaise, I stopped, knowing that Pitcairn had a case on, and took Nancy in "to see him at his work." Every little while after that I would find her disappeared from the house, and on going to the court would see her midget pony fastened outside, and the little chestnut head and big gray eyes looking over the back of the high bench in front; for the officers, who knew she was my daughter, soon grew to understand her ways and let her in without parley. I can solemnly affirm that I thought this a most unwise way for a child to spend her time, but there was something about Nancy herself which prevented my giving orders. I can not say that she ever disobeyed me, and yet, I knew then, as I know now, that had I tried to stop her she would have evaded me, and as it turned out in the end, it was all for the best.

I who was with her day by day could feel her growing dislike of Hugh Pitcairn, and once she came to me after a visit to the court, her cheeks flaming, her eyes dilated, and her body literally shaking with emotion.

"He cursed at Pitcairn as they dragged him out," she said, and then bringing her little fists down on my knee, she cried with apparent irrelevancy:

"It's not the way, Jock! It's not the way!"

Less than a fortnight after I was sitting over some accounts in the east room, when Hugh Pitcairn entered unannounced.

"Well, Jock Stair," he said, "that daughter of yours lost me as pretty a case to-day as I ever had."

"Indeed, Hugh," I returned, "I'm in no way answerable for that."

"I don't know about that!" he broke in. "This case was one of a young woman who had taken a purse. She established the fact that she was a widow with two small children, one of whom was dying and needed medicine. I thought at first that she borrowed one of the children, they frequently do, but it was established hers. I drew attention to the anarchy which would inevitably follow if each individual were allowed to help himself to his neighbor's belongings, and the jury was with me. As I was concluding, that child of yours slipped from her place, climbed the steps on the side, and heeding judges and jury less than Daft Jamie, went straight toward the prisoner, pulled herself up on a chair beside the woman, and putting her arms around the culprit's neck, as though to defend her against the devil himself, turned her eyes in my direction and fairly glowered at me.

"The spectators cheered, and a woman in the front cried, 'God bless the baby,' while the judge—Carew it was, a sentimentalist and a menace to the bar—dried the tears from his eyes openly, *and the jury decided against me without leaving the box*," he thundered, as though I were in some way responsible.

I groaned. Taking this for sympathy, he went on:

"I'm glad ye feel about it as I do."

"To be frank with you, Pitcairn," I answered, "I don't; and it's not for your lost case I groan, but for what is likely to come to me because of it."

Nor was I mistaken. Just at the gloaming time, while there was still a little of the yellow hanging in the west, I saw the figure of a woman with a baby in her arms outlined clear against the sky on the top of the hill, and by her side trotted the little creature who had all my heart, leading her home.

"There," said I to Pitcairn, pointing to them, "that's what your inadequacy at the law has cost me. There are three more people whom Nancy has fetched home for me to support."

"I wonder at ye sometimes, Jock Stair," he cried at this, "I wonder at ye!—for in many ways ye seem an intelligent man—that ye can let a small girl-child have her way with you as ye do."

The outer door closed as he spoke, and I heard the patter of little feet.

"She's not being raised right. She'll be a creature of no breeding. Ye should take her——"

At this the door opened and Nancy came in. At the sight of Pitcairn she stopped on her way toward me, and her black brows came together in an ecstasy of rage. Putting her little body directly in front of him she looked him full in the eye.

"Devil!" she said, and walked out of the room, leaving us standing staring at each other, speechless, and I noted with glee that, on one occasion at least, I saw Hugh Pitcairn abashed.

This occurrence in the court did not pass in the town unnoticed, for Bishop Ames, of St.

Margaret's, on the following Sunday preached from the text: "And a little child shall lead them," telling the story from the pulpit; while the Sentinel of the next week spoke of Nancy with flattery and tenderness. The publicity given to the affair alarmed me in no small degree, and I reasoned with myself that a child who had such fearlessness and such disrespect for established ways was a problem which somebody wiser than myself should have the handling of.

There were three other occurrences which fell about this time which brought this thought still more vividly to my mind, the first of these bringing the knowledge that she had no religion. Entering the hall one morning I met the little creature coming from the stairway, dragging an enormous book behind her as though it were a go-cart. She had put a stout string through the middle of the volume, and with this passed round her waist was making her way with it toward the library.

"Jock," she said, backing at sight of me and sitting down upon the great volume as though it were a footstool, "did you ever read a book called Old Testament?"

"Not so much as I should," I answered, realizing with a strange jolt of mind that it was the Bible she was dragging after her.

"I got it in the attic," she said, as she climbed upon my knee, "and I thought at first it was a joke-book. And after I thought it was a fairy-book; but as I go on, *there seems more to it.*"

And the second of these episodes was as disconcerting:

The dwarfed boy was Nancy's peculiar care among the Burnside people, and the question as to why he was made "crookit," as she called it, was one which I had never been able to answer to her satisfaction.

Coming in one day with a little bunch of violets for me, she stopped before leaving the room, and said, as though telling me a funny secret:

"Jamie Henderlin took Nancy's money."

"What?" I cried.

"Yes," she said, "took it out of the little bag when he thought I was not looking."

"What did you do?" I inquired.

"I?" she turned away shyly, "I made out that I didn't see him."

"But, Nancy," I said, "that was not really kind. As he grows older he will steal."

"Take," she interrupted firmly.

"He will take from other people."

"He is a dwarf, Jock," she said, with a sweet irrelevance, which had its logic, however, in her kind heart.

"That doesn't make it right."

"He wanted it more than I did," she went on; "I don't need it——"

"That doesn't excuse him, either."

"Perhaps," she said, "if you and I, mine Jock, were made as he is we might do something worse than he has done. *People laugh at him!* He mayn't be right. I'm not saying that he is right; but I *am* saying that *I* am not going to hurt his feelings. The Lord has done that enough already."

And the third one, never told by Mrs. Opie, and a fortunate thing it was for us, had to do with her skill in the use of a pen. She was still a very little child, lying on a rug by the fire, reading out of the Bible, as I sat at the desk looking over some accounts which would not come right. There was the matter of a draft for five pounds, with my own name to it, which

I had certainly no remembrance of ever having signed.

"What's the matter, Jock?" said Nancy, seeing my knit brow.

"They won't come right, Little Flower," I answered.

She came over to me and looked at the accounts.

"Nancy made one just like Jock's," she said.

"What?" I cried, with consternation.

"Nancy — made — one — just — like — Jock's," she repeated. "A poor lady who was very sick," she explained, "was by here one day you had gone. I made one for her."

"Nancy," I said, taking her on my knee, "do you know that it is a crime to sign another person's name without his leave?"

"How crime?"

"Well, it's the thing people get locked in jails for——"

She laughed out loud and lay back on my arm at this.

"It's all mine, isn't it?" she asked.

I had told this so often that I couldn't gainsay it.

"*Wrong to write Sandy's name, not wrong* *to write Jock's,*" she crooned in a sort of song; and this was as far as I got with her concerning it.

I told Sandy these three tales, and he roared with glee.

"Her morals are all tail first," he said, "though very sound! But she'll have us in the poor farm and herself in jail if she keeps this up."

CHAPTER VII

I TAKE NANCY'S EDUCATION IN HAND

Father Michel, Sandy, and Hugh Pitcairn were the only ones who knew enough of the child to make their advices on the subject of an education for her of any value, and it was the priest whom I consulted first.

"My lord," he said, after listening to my tale, "it's a peculiar case, and one which, I openly state, is beyond me. In every bout with her I am routed by a certain lawless sincerity of utterance, or by her fastening her eyes upon me and asking, 'Why?' or 'Who says that?' She is gentleness and sweetness itself; but any attempt which I have ever made to instruct her in religion has been utterly without results. Sometimes she goes to sleep, other whiles she laughs and questions me in a way that makes the flesh crawl. When I told her of the crucifixion of our blessed Lord, she fell into such a frenzy that it brought on the aching head and fever, which you will remember caused your lordship such alarm. We have the raising of a genius upon us, and by that I mean one who knows more, sees deeper, feels more keenly than is given to most or to any except the few. Miss Nancy is a fearless soul, a passionate, loving, powerful nature, and my belief is that the only way to control her is to let her develop her own powers in her own way. It is a hard question, a subtle question, my lord; but I believe it is the only way."

Sandy was in London at the time, but the same day on which I had the talk with Father Michel I sent for Hugh Pitcairn, asking him to dine with me and talk over the Problem of Nancy.

"It's like this, Hugh," said I, as we sat over some wine of his particular fancy, "God has been kind enough to send me a wonderful child, and I want to do what's right by her. I want her to have the reasonable education of a man and to keep her as far as possible from the influence of the usual unthinking female. I neither want her instructed in false modesty, lying, nor the deception of the male sex. It is on the male virtues that I want the accent placed; bravery, honesty, self-knowledge, and responsibility for her words and conduct; good manly virtues that most women know only as words of the dictionary."

Hugh stared across at me, and there was a look in his eyes of being tolerant toward crass ignorance as he answered:

"There are whiles when you are more humorous than others, Jock Stair. This is your most fanciful time yet. There's no such thing possible, and ye can just rest by that! Ye can't make a woman into a man by any method of rearing, for there are six thousand years of ancestry to overcome. That's somewhat, and with the female physiology and the Lord himself against you, I'm thinking it wise for you to have your daughter reared like other women and to fulfil woman's great end."

"And what's that?" I asked.

"To marry and bring children into the world," he returned, as certainly as he would have stated the time of day.

"When all's said and done and theorized over concerning the female sex," he went on, "ye just find yourself back at that. Ye can't educate a woman as ye can a man; she's not got the same faculties to take in the information that ye offer her. Why," he cried, "ye can't give her any sense of abstract right or wrong. In order to protect her young she has inherited certain keen faculties and instincts which we poor male creatures are without; but from the minute she becomes a wife or mother she ceases in some degree to have a conscience. No," he finished, "when a woman's emotions are stirred you can't believe a word she says."

"Ye've seen for yourself that Nancy's different from the girl children ye've known," I said, with some remonstrance in my voice.

"She has power, true. And magnetism, true. And great beauty," he answered, counting these on his fingers as though they were points in law; "but give her a man's education, and what have ye done? Simply made a dangerous contrivance of her to get her own way. I tell ye, Jock," he said in conclusion, "ye can't civilize women. They are not intended to be civilized."

The longer I thought this talk over, the more firmly I became fixed in the belief that Hugh knew nothing concerning the matter, and that my own ideas on the subject were the best, and in less than a week I had my own old schoolbooks down, and was casting around for a tutor for Nancy, firm in my intention of "bringing her up a perfect gentleman," as Hugh derisively stated. I fixed on Latin for her, and sound mathematics, and later Greek and Logic, and when I showed this list of studies to Pitcairn, I recall that he looked at me, with the usual pity in his glance, and asked dryly:

"Why not tiger shooting and the high-jump?"

Sandy was from home at this time, having been called to a dying wife, poor fellow, or I should have taken advice with him concerning a certain old teacher of his boy Danvers, for whom I had a great liking. While awaiting his return I took the Little Flower into my confidence, and found her delighted that she was to be "teached." There was one point upon which she was firm, however, which was that none but Father Michel should be her instructor, and the good man, with many a dubious shake of his head, entered upon his work the following week.

Often after this time I would come upon them in the small writing-room where the studies were conducted, to find the little one standing by the father's knee, as he held the book for her, or sitting in his lap looking up at him with a funny earnestness, as though they were playing together, going over

——rego
——regere
——rexi
——rectus

or some such work, and amazing us both by her capacities.

On her ninth birthday Hugh gave her the ponderous tome from which so much of Mrs. Opie's facts have been obtained, and into this volume she put her verses and her thoughts just as they came into her curly head, standing upon a stool to make her high enough to reach the writing-table with comfort. There was an unspoken understanding between us that I was at liberty to read this book, but never in her presence. One night after she had spent the afternoon at work upon it, I drew it toward me, to find a new set of verses beginning:

The heifer by the milking pail,
Whose neck-cloth is so white, etc.

and underneath the following, in which the influence of the Good Book was surely visible:

“MY COMANDMENCE!

1. I must love Jock Stair first of all created things, for he was my mother's friend and mine.
2. Since the Lord has cast the poor from him *I* must do what I can for them.
3. I must not be afraid of any livving thing, for no gentleman can show forth fear.
4. I must not wish Huey Macrath from Stair, tho' he snuffles and his ears are large, for he was here before I was and is very ritechus.
5. I must not swear, tho' Sandy does, and to say dam is not godly, for a girl.

More to morrow,
L. F. S.”

I was prouder of these than I have words to tell, seeing that already she was beginning to consider conduct. And an event which followed soon after made me plume myself still further. I had taught her to play chess, and Danvers Carmichael being home from his English school, Sandy and I made a merry wager of a game for a guinea a side, each of us backing the talent of our own offspring. Nancy, who was about half Danvers' height, drew the whites, and led off by the good conservative opening of the king's knight, the boy replying well and putting the pieces out after the usual fashion. Nancy unexpectedly played her queen. "Check," she said. Dand interposed a pawn. Nancy moved a knight. "Check," she said again. Dand was forced to move his king, and in three moves I could see the game was hers. Suddenly she retreated and began a process which never in my whole experience with her had I seen duplicated. She trifled ineffectually with her men, moving them hither and thither with no purpose or aim; and, to crown all, after one of these fruitless moves, the boy cried, "Mate," placing his queen triumphantly from one side of the board to the other. Nancy's eyes shone with pleasure.

"You beat me," she cried. "Sandy won the guinea, Jock."

I can not recall when a small thing annoyed me as much as this one did, and the next morning, finding the Little Flower making verses on the west wall, I sat down to get some explanation from her.

"Nancy," I began, "why did you play so badly at chess last night?"

The shy look with which I was familiar came into her face.

"He can't play chess, Jock," she said.

"I know it," I cried; "I saw that; but why did you disgrace your father, young woman, answer me that?"

"Oh," she answered, with great earnestness, "do you no see? He's a man-child, and his father was looking on; and it would have been a fair disgrace for him to be beaten at the game by me, who am only a girl, and younger. I couldn't do it, Jock," she cried, and her cheeks flushed with a glorious pink color. "I couldn't do it. No gentleman could!"

I glowed with pride at the sight of her, my hopes rose high, and I told the story, together with her "Comandmence," to Hugh Pitcairn for his admiration and approval.

He was as unmoved, however, at the end of my narration as at the beginning of it.

"She's no a woman yet; she's just a wee bit bairn; but as soon as she begins to sigh for joes and bawbees she'll be just like the rest. They're all of them elemental things," he said with conviction, "and ye can't change their natures any more than ye can stop fire from burning."

Later he began to alter his opinion of her, however, and it fell, I think, largely through his own vanity. I have told of the scene in the court which resulted in Jeanie Henderlin and her two children coming to be Burn-folk, and from that time Nancy would turn back every little while to her interest in the law. There were some compilations of celebrated cases among my books, and for a while her talk ran of the trials for murder and poisoning and the scuttling of ships, until I wondered where the thing would lead. Part of these accounts were briefed; others contained the evidence entire, indictments, questions and answers, the judges' instructions, and the verdict rendered, all with much legal verbiage and twisting.

One night, in her twelfth year, she asked Hugh Pitcairn some questions concerning a poison case, which happened to be one he had studied with interest himself, and he denounced the verdict as one unlawful and obtained by sentiment rather than from the evidence itself, promising to send another book to her containing his own view of the matter. Here was a ground in which a friendship with Hugh could take firm root, and from that time on there were heavy volumes coming to Nancy from the great barrister constantly, and to hear her quizzed by him concerning the law on certain points was one of the most humorous bits of my life. I never rightly understood this trend of Nancy's mind. In her talks with me I found it was never to discover the naked law on a point, but how punishment might be evaded, that interested her. "If he'd said this," or "had he left that unsaid," or "if the defense had proven," was the burden of her remarks, and I thought at times that if Hugh saw the thing as I did he would find at bottom of all her lawing only a woman's desire to discover how people could be got out of trouble, whether deserving punishment or not.

In her fifteenth year, when I was obliged to go to London concerning the Forfeited Estates, I had her with me; but even then the lawing between Pitcairn and herself did not cease, for packets passed between them constantly, and soon after our return, Nancy's being eighteen at the time, I found that she had wrought a change in him, as well as in the rest of us.

"Jock Stair," he said to me one night, as though addressing a jury, "I told you once that it was impossible to civilize a woman, that all education just went over their heads and affected their natures none at all; that it was beyond them to conceive an abstract right or wrong; that I had never seen one who had a jot of public spirit. I feel a sense of duty in telling you I've changed. I have seen one. It's your daughter, Nancy Stair!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE DAFT DAYS

WE came back to Scotland in July, 1786, and one day, late in the month, Nancy came in to tell me that she intended having a birthday party that same evening.

"Whose?" said I.

"Mine," she answered.

"It's all very well, but your birthday is not in July——"

"I never fancied March to be born in," she replied imperturbably, "and I've changed it."

"And who are you going to bid to the feast of your adopted birthday?"

"You," she said, "and Sandy, and Jamie Henderlin, for he's back from Germany, and I want to hear him play." *

It is altogether hopeless to set in cold words

---

* After Jamie Henderlin became famous for his violin playing it was noised abroad that I alone was his patron. But the truth of the matter is that Sandy shared with me the expense of his German studies.

the charm of her as she stood before me that morning in her white frock, her hair in a bunch of curls on top of her head and some posies in her hand. I have seen many pretty women in my time, some few handsome ones, but Nancy Stair is the only one I ever saw who deserved to be described as beautiful. The fashion-prints of the day were full of her, and I have one account before me, printed at the very time of which I write, 1786:

"Miss Stair," it reads, "is just back from London, where for two years she has studied her voice with Trebillini.

"Her beauty is bewildering; her gowns the acme of elegance and feminine grace; her wit, her eyes, her lips, the toast of the town. Her songs, a second printing of which is being clamored for, are being read over the Three Kingdoms, with a letter from his Royal Majesty, George III, on the fly-leaf commending them. When it is known that she is to attend service at St. Giles the clubs are emptied and half the beaux of the town may be found on their knees where they can have a view of her. The greatest statesmen and lawyers of the day are her intimate friends, and the crowds follow her in admiration when she drives through the streets."

A good picture, but scant, for there is not a word in it of her heart, the kindest and bravest that ever beat in woman's breast, nor her great love and tenderness to all created things.

On the afternoon of this dinner I fixed my mind definitely upon a matter upon which I had been pondering for some time. Coming in from the bank about five, I called Nancy to me, and handed her the box I carried.

"Is it a present for me?" she asked, her face aglow.

"A present for you, Little Flower, from the proudest father in the world."

As I spoke she opened the casket and her eyes fell on the gems of which I have already written—the ornaments of the ladies of Stair for hundreds of years gone by—but for none, save one, so fair as she. I would have sold Stair itself, if need be, to give her such joy. The emerald necklace, which had been a year in the making, a brooch of the same stones, with diamonds glittering in flower clusters, I found, were the ones she liked the best, and she brought a mirror to sit beside me as she tried them all, one by one, upon her hair, her neck, and arms, demanding that Dame Dickenson and Huey be brought to look at her.

And a curious thing fell, that, as she was engaged with the jewels, a note was brought from Mr. Pitcairn, which she read without interest, saying after;

"Does he think I care anything about 'Lorimer *vs.* The Crown' with a necklace like this?" and I fell to wondering, with some dismay, what Hugh would think concerning her masculine mind if he had heard the speech.

We were awaiting a summons to the meal that evening when Nancy entered; a new Nancy, and one so wondrous to behold that Sandy and I started at the sight of her. She wore a gown of yellow crêpe embroidered in gold, low and sleeveless, with a fold in the back, after the fashion of the ladies of Watteau, and a long train falling far behind. Her hair was gathered high and dressed with jewels which sparkled as well upon her throat and hands. The thing that marked her most, an alluring touchableness, was doubly present as she came toward us, laughing, with a profound courtesy.

"My Lord Stair and Mr. Carmichael, you who have had the raising of me, how do you like the work of your hands?"

"Ye can not throw us off our guard by braw clothes, Lady," Sandy responded, with a laugh, "for we know you only too well, and to our distress of mind and pocket. Ye're a spoiled bit, in spite of the severe discipline your father and I have reared ye by. Here's a thing I got from a peddler-body for ye," he ended.

She opened the morocco case which he handed her, to find a necklet of pearls with diamonds clasping them, and the tears came into her eyes as she kissed him for the gift.

"I can not thank ye enough!—never, in all my life—for all ye've done for me, Sandy. I love you," she says, "and well you know it; and with that we'll go to dinner. I go with Jamie," she added, slipping her arm through his, "for ye must learn that genius ever goes before wealth and titles," and with a laugh she and Jamie Henderlin went out before us.

After dinner we sat outside for a while, Sandy and I smoking, as Nancy and Jamie talked of the outer world and the celebrities of London and Paris. The lamps from the little settlement on the burn twinkled through the trees, while farther off the lights from the town of Edinburgh shone soft and silvery beneath the glimmering moon. We could hear the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the cows in the long lane down by the Holm and the bells of the old Tron deaving our ears by striking the hour of eight.

There is little use, with Jamie playing to the greatest people of the world at the moment of my writing, for me to tell the surprise and delight we had in his music; or the new joy that Sandy felt in Nancy's singing, it being the first time he had heard her voice for over two years.

"Do you want to hear some of my own verses?" she asked him at length. "Mr. Thomson has been kind enough to set some of them to music." And then she sang, for the first time to my hearing, those two songs of hers which were afterward whistled, sung, hummed, or shouted by every one in Scotland, from the judge on the bench to the caddie on the streets:

Soutar Sandy,
Wed wi' Mandy
On a Monday morning,

and the set of three double verses, since published in the Glasgow Sentinel, "The Maid wi' the Wistfu' Eye," * which, as I hope for Heaven, Rab Burns told me one night at Creech's he envied her for having written.

Suddenly, as she was looking over the music, she began to hum, and Dame Dickenson and I exchanged a look of strange remembrance, as, with no accompaniment whatever, and as though the thought had just seized her, she poured forth her soul and her voice together in that old gipsy tune—Marian's song, as I have always called it:

"Love that is life
Love that is death,
Love that is mine—"

changed at the last into:

"Love that is wrong,
Love that is strong,
Love that is death—"

and as we listened, taken out of ourselves by her beauty and the tragedy of her voice, a figure came from the gloom into the light of the doorway, and a gay voice cried:

---

*Poems by Nancy Stair, Pailey Edition, pages 44, 67

"Shall I be arrested for trespass, Lord Stair?" and to our amazement Danvers Carmichael stood before us.

I had never seen the lad since the day it was determined to make an Oxford man of him, instead of following out his father's wishes and fetching him home to our own University, and the surprise I felt at sight of him, a grown man and a monstrous fine one, gave me something of a jolt in my mind at the rapid passing of the years.

He was tall and handsome, with bright, brave ways, a distinguished carriage, and a delightful speaking voice. His face was clean shaven, showing a chin heavy but with fine lines, and lips which curved back complacently over teeth of singular whiteness. His mouth denoted pride as well as obstinacy, which, taken with the brooding look in the eye, gave me the impression of a nature both jealous and passionate. One of his greatest charms, and I felt it on the instant of our meeting, was a gay but unassertive manner, possible only to those who have had a secured position from birth. I noted as well a fine sense in his relation to others, and believe that if he had come a-begging we would have known him to be gently born. He wore high boots, a broad hat, and a handsome riding suit of light cloth, with a cloak hanging from one shoulder. He carried himself with jauntiness and surety; gave one's hand a hearty grip, and, to sum it all up, was one of the finest men I have ever seen, and a son of whom even Sandy Carmichael had a right to be proud, in spite of the fact that he was a man of fashion and something of a dandy. He had as well a certain romantic appearance and a glance which made young girls drop their eyes before him and set old ladies to talking of their first loves.

"When Dand Carmichael goes up High Street I never saw a woman looking down it," Bob Blake said of him once, which sums it all up very well.

Upon being asked by his father as to the suddenness of his appearance among us, he said with a laugh:

"I came with some men to Leith, and the Leith fly set me down at the door of The Star and Garter by the Tron church about an hour ago. I asked mine host of the inn if I could get a horse from him to ride to Arran House;

upon which he told me that there would be no use in my going to Arran as Mr. Carmichael was from home, being bid to dinner at Lord Stair's; that it was the eighteenth birthday of Mistress Nancy Stair, and that Jamie Henderlin had come from Germany with his violin the week before and was to play at Stair House after the dinner; that the Lord Stair, who was a fond father, had but this afternoon given the family jewels to Mistress Nancy, and that one ruby alone would buy the inn; that Mr. Carmichael had brought a present for her of a pearl necklace with diamonds in it of great value; that Mistress Nancy Stair, who was the handsomest girl in three kingdoms, had a yellow gown, a great deal of which lay on the floor, the stuff of which he understood had come from France; that Dame Dickenson had made a birthday cake, and there was a salmon for the dinner with egg sauce, and that eggs were uncommon high and the tax on whisky a thing not to be borne. There were some other trifling details he mentioned," he said with a wave of his hand and a laugh, "which have unfortunately escaped my memory."

There was much real humor in his relation of the inn gossip, and the brightness of his presence caused a gayer air to our small festivity. Our talk brought Nancy to the door, where she stood in a shaft of light looking down at us.

"What are you laughing about?" she cried.

At the sound of her voice Danvers sprang to his feet and went toward her with outstretched hand, but at the sight of her beauty or her jewels, I know not which, he changed his mind and made a sweeping bow instead.

"And this," he said, "is the Miss Nancy of whom I have heard so much——"

"Sandy's apt to mention me," she answered demurely.

"He never did you justice," he responded, with a smile toward his father. "In all but this he's the best parent in the world, but he's fallen short in the matter of letting me know about you."

"If ye'd stayed in ye're own country ye'd have known," retorted Sandy, from behind his pipe.

"I have been away too long," Dand answered him, but the look was at Nancy.

"Do you stay now?" she asked.

"I had intended to go back at the end of the week, but I have changed my mind. With my father's leave, I'll spend the summer——"

"It does not take you long to change your mind," Nancy returned with a smile.

"No," he said, and here he leaned forward, took her hand and kissed it. "No! It took me just one second:"

I knew that she was not to be moved by any admiration which happened to come by. She paid a gracious attention to Danvers Carmichael, it is true, insisting, though he stoutly affirmed to the contrary, that she knew him to be hungry, that one could not *dine* at The Star and Garter, ordering a small table with some cold fowl and a bottle of wine for him, all as though it were the thing nearest her heart. I, who knew her, understood that if it had been a tramp body from the lowlands who had come upon us she would have given the same thought to him and forgotten him by morning; but to a man, London bred and unaware as yet with whom his dealings lay, her solicitude for him might readily be interpreted as having something more purely personal in its nature.

And this day was to be marked by another event than the home-coming of Danvers; an event which, if it had occurred six weeks later, might have changed the destiny of many lives, and given England another Premier than William Pitt. Before we parted for the night, Danvers took from his pocket a book, which he handed to Nancy with a bow.

"It's not family jewels; nor yet a trifling necklace of pearls; nor can I honestly affirm it was intended as a gift, but if you will accept it from me as a birthday token it will make me very glad," and he handed the volume to her.

"Poetry," she said with a pleased smile, "and in the Scot. Robert Burns! Is he a new man?"

"He's a plowman in Ayr, somewhere, and I have it that his verses are something fine. I've not read them myself, and the thought comes to me a little late that they may not be the fittest reading for a young lady, but your father will judge of it for you."

Sandy and I laughed aloud at this.

"The reason these ill-natured gentlemen laughed at you as they did was because of the lax way they have brought me up," Nancy explained. "They've let me 'gang my ain gate' since I was five. I've had no right raising," she said, and the very sweetness of her as she said it would have made any man keen for the rearing which produced her. "So, considering my superior knowledge of evil, I'll look the book over myself and see if it is the kind of reading I should like to put in the hands of Sandy and Jock."

Danvers Carmichael's eyes glowed with humor as he joined in the laugh with us.

"Under your careful bringing up they should be fine fellows, these fathers of ours," he laughed.

"I've done the best I could by them," Nancy answered demurely; "but on the whole, Mr. Carmichael, I think I have succeeded better with Jamie Henderlin."

When Nancy withdrew, Danvers went with her to the foot of the stairs, holding her in talk for a few minutes, with looks of passionate approval in his eyes.

Before we went to our rooms, for I insisted that they should remain all night at Stair, the talk turned upon marriage in some way, and Sandy rallied his son upon his bachelorhood.

"Twenty-four years old," he said, "and a bachelor still! Why, I was a father at that time. Never mind," he continued, "never mind, my lad. Your time is coming!"

"In truth, I think it has come," Danvers returned, simply, and the glance that went with the words was not toward his father, but toward me.

I was lying in my bed with eyes staring wide at the ceiling, recalling Nancy's real birthday more than eighteen years gone by; thinking of Marian; wondering if she knew the beauty of the child we had; demanding from the Great Father of all that she should know—should remember Nancy and me; that she, the mother and wife, might, in some way unknown to us, still be a part of our earthly living; recalling Danvers with approval, dreaming perhaps that Nancy and he, at no far date, might marry and so cement a friendship between two middle-aged gentlemen who had foregathered with each other many years before, when I heard a light tap at my door.

"Who is it?" I cried.

"It's Nancy," answered the voice. "May I come in?"

She pushed the door ajar and entered in a long white dressing-gown, carrying in one hand a branch of candles and in the other a book, with her finger marking the place.

It is exceedingly hard for me to describe the beauty of her, the uplifted look on her face and the shine of her eye, for this beauty seemed kindled by a fire from within, and she had with it an excitement as of one who had heard pleasant news or to whom great treasures have just been given.

"Jock," she asked, "have you been sleeping?"

"No," said I.

"Oh, listen then," she cried, "for indeed it was not possible that I should sleep without telling you what's come to me. It's this Burns man," she went on; "no one, not even Shakespeare, has spoken so. It's as though he taught a new religion. It's kindness all through, and charity and love; with rhymes upon rhymes, as if it were child's play for him to make verses. It's raised me out of myself. It's what I've always known was true. It's the liberty, equality, and fraternity of France. It's the 'all men were born free and equal' of the colonies. It's all, and more, that I've tried to work out on the burn-side. It's like a great voice calling. Oh," she cried, "Ramsay's nothing to him, and Fergusson but a gusty child."

"Nancy, darling," I said, "have ye risen in the middle of the night to tear down the idols of your childhood? Let me see the book," I cried, for a bit of rhyme was a choicer draught to me than a glass of an old vintage.

"Let me read ye this," she said—I can remember now the slant white light of a late moon coming in through the casement, the honeysuckle's breath, and her face, half in light, half in shadow, as she read the Epistle to Davie. As I listened I sat upright, more engrossed, wider eyed; and when she came to those two stanzas, the greatest of their kind ever penned, I was off my feet with her, and on my oath we sat till the purpling flush came in the east, in an ecstasy of appreciation of him "who walked in glory and in joy behind his plow upon the mountain-side":

"What tho', like commoners of air,
We wander out, we know not where,
But either house or hall *without*.
"Yet nature's charms, the hills and woods,
The sweeping vales, an' foaming floods
Are free alike to all

In days when daisies deck the ground,
And blackbirds whistle clear,
With honest joy our hearts will bound,
To see the coming year:
On *braes* when we please then, *heights.*
We'll sit an' *sowth* a tune; *whistle softly*
Syne rhyme *till't*, we'll time till't,
afterwards. *to it.*
An' sing't when we hae done."

"Oh, Jock," she says, "I've done it often; haven't you?"

"It's no in titles nor in rank;
It's no in wealth like Lon'non bank,
To purchase peace and rest;
It's no in makin' muckle mair
It's no in books, it's no in *lear* *learning*
To make us truly blest:
If happiness hae not her seat
An' centre in the breast,
We may be wise, or rich, or great,
But never can be blest,
Nae treasures nor pleasures
Could make us happy lang;
The heart ay's the part ay
That makes us right or wrang."
—BURNS, 1785.

"It's just grand," I said, "Nancy; and there're no two ways of it."

"There's about all there is of life in this little book, and it's made my rhyming-ware cheap. Do you think," she says, coming over to kiss me before I sent her off to bed, "do you think I can ever meet wi' Mr. Burns?"

"If you want it, you shall," I said; "unless the man himself objects. We'll have him up to Stair; and now forget him and get some rest, Little Flower."

She went away and left me, and I turned to sleep with that great couplet going over and over in my head like the clatter of horses' hoofs:

"The heart ay's the part ay
That makes us right or wrang."

CHAPTER IX

DANVERS BECOMES BETTER ACQUAINTED WITH NANCY

There were two reasons why Danvers was able to see Nancy almost uninterruptedly the next two or three weeks, the first being that we were but late returned from London, with old ties to be formed anew; and the second, a law affair among the Burn-folk, the trouble of which took much of Nancy's time, and eventually brought into our lives the great Duke of Borthwicke, of whom I shall have more to say. These left Danvers a fair field where Nancy was concerned, and no man living ever covered his ground better or made a braver wooing. From the minute his eye lighted upon her in the doorway it seemed as though it were "all by with him," as the country folk say, for he seemed to have no thoughts but for her, with the world welcome to a knowledge of the fact.

Every day the conservatories of Arran were stripped for her, hampers of fruit, and books, and notes which sent the blood rioting to her cheeks, were over every morning; and before they could be forgotten, Danvers was there in person, a handsome, passionate, dominating lover, whose nature was one I could understand and whose love-making was as headlong and impetuous as my own had been.

I remember watching him bending over her one night as they stood together before going in to dinner, and Marian's words came back to me at sight of him:

"For ye woo as a man should woo; and I'm won as a woman should be won—because she has no will to choose."

Talk of Danvers fell between Sandy and me quite naturally at this time, and one night, when I was praising his boy to him with much enthusiasm, he answered with a laugh:

"Of course you like him! Why shouldn't you? You're of a piece, the two of you. You are both primeval creatures, not far removed in your love-making from the time when men lived in caves, and if they wanted a woman they knocked her down with a club and carried her home, and the wooing was over."

"Barring the knocking down," I answered, "it's not so bad a way."

"That's well enough," he retorted, "where women are but gentle female animals. But take a woman with a mind or gift—such as Nancy Stair has—and ye'll find a complication in the affair not to be solved with a club."

The two of us had no small sport with Danvers over his condition, for he had fallen in love to such an extent that he would start sentences which he forgot to finish, make the most irrelevant remarks, or drop into a-dreaming in the midst of talk, so that his father fell to recalling him by shouting:

"View Halloo!" in a very loud voice, as they do on the hunting field, following it up by talk full of a jeering seriousness, as it were:

"Do you think, Danvers, in—er—your present state, you would be able to get this letter to the post?"

Or,

"Would ye be like to fall into a sound slumber if ye started to ring for a stable-boy, Dand?"

Or,

"Do you think you could charge your mind, without danger to it, with passing me the brandy?" all of which the lad bore with an amused smile and open shamelessness.

One night, after dinner, during this time, I recall that there was a discussion over the cutting of a roadway between our houses, and after Sandy had thrown in the fatherly suggestion that if Danvers remained at Arran much longer the road would be worn by his footsteps with no expense to us, Danvers, who was awaiting Nancy to walk on the porch with him, began:

"I think——"

"Ye need go no further," Sandy broke in, with a laugh. "You flatter yourself! You *think,*" he continued; "you've been incapable of thought for nearly two weeks. Neither of us would give a boddle for your opinion on any subject save one. I'll wager," he said, coming over to his son and putting a hand on each of his shoulders, "that ye could not count twenty straight ahead, if your salvation depended on it. And to think that I have been raising a great fellow like you to be ordered about by a slip of a girl. Ye're crazy," he said, going on, "stark, Bedlam crazy!"

On the moment of his speaking Nancy came to the door with mutinous eyes, a riot of color in her cheeks, and some filmy white stuff drawn round her head and shoulders, and as she stood Danvers turned to us.

"Look at her!" he cried. "How else would ye have me be?"

We were out of doors one afternoon, perhaps a week later, sitting in the shadow of the great tower. Nancy, in a frock of green, cut out at the neck, and a bewildering big hat with pink flowers upon it, was pouring tea for us, with Danvers Carmichael lying at full length on the grass beside her, smoking and inventing excuses at intervals to touch her hand.

The talk drifted round to Robert Burns, and when I stated the manner in which Nancy and I had spent the first night we had had his book, Danvers regarded us with no small degree of amazement.

"Did you," he inquired, after a pause, "sit up all night reading rhyme, the two of you?"

"We did," said I; "and it's not the first night we have passed so, Nancy Stair and I."

"But why," he went on, "couldn't you wait till the morning?"

"We're no made that way," I answered, with a laugh.

"Well," he returned, "the thing is as incomprehensible to me as if you'd tattooed yourself; but," he added philosophically, clasping his hands behind his head and staring up into the sky, "every man knows his own fun. There's a friend of mine who knows this Burns," he added.

"What does he say of him?" I inquired with interest.

"Billy's hardly one to appreciate poetry," he answered, "but he fell in with Burns somewhere at a masons' meeting. He said he was a handsome pirate, who had sent the clergy of his native place into despair; that he made love to every woman he saw, and that his name was the scandal of the county; but that personally he considered the man a wonder and liked him fine."

"Jock's going to have him here," Nancy said, with a pleased smile and shining eyes.

"No, no," cried Danvers Carmichael, vehemently, sitting upright. "I wouldn't do that, my lord."

"Why not?" Nancy inquired.

"It's a matter," he said, "that I could explain better to Lord Stair than to you, Miss Nancy," and there was a consideration for her in his tone which warmed my heart toward him.

"You mean," Nancy said, with a smile, "that he's not a good man and will make love to me, mayhap, or that it might harm me in some way. You don't appreciate the rearing I've had, I'm afraid," she said, handing down another cup of tea to him. "Lawing with Pitcairn and dealing with all manner of roguery and villainy on the burn-side have taught me many things. These two gentlemen have reared me up in a strange way. Once I heard Sandy say:

"'She's a filly that's got to be given her head, and she'll soon learn the fences that it is wise to take and the ones that it is wise to let alone.'"

"And were we not wise?" Sandy interrupted, "were we not wise? Ye know, Mistress Stair, ye were no easy matter to bring up. Always like a flower, gentle as a ewe lamb, seeing into everybody's heart, verse-making till your poor little head ached, joining gipsy folk, foregathering with tramps and criminals, wheedling the heart out of every one of us, but under it all, fixed in a determination to have your own way in spite of the deil himself. Ye were a pretty problem for two lone men to handle."

"Don't be believing them, Dandy," she said, turning the light of those wonderful gray eyes down on him. "Ye will not, will ye? They are not always truthful," she said, with a side-glance toward us both.

"In spite of your training?" Dandy laughed.

"In spite of my training," Nancy answered demurely.

As we sat thus, the bright warm day passing lazily toward the twilight, I saw a figure come from one of the houses on the burn, and start at the top of speed along the ford-rift, which led through the harrowed field. As it neared the south gate I saw that it was Jamie Henderlin, who broke into our group, his pallor and anxiety forming abundant excuse for the interruption to our talk.

"Miss Nancy," he cried, "they've convicted him!"

"Convicted Lapraik?" Nancy asked, as though it were impossible.

"Yes, in an hour or less. Pitcairn had another witness—and Tod's sentenced to transportation!"

No happening which I can think of would have set Nancy Stair more plainly before Danvers than this one, which fell directly beneath his eye.

"But," she said, and her eyes blackened as she spoke, "the man is innocent."

"Every one knows it," Jamie cried; "but Meenie's like to go to the grave because of the trouble, which means naught to Pitcairn or to him called the Duke of Borthwicke."

"Ah, well, Jamie," said Nancy soothingly, "you must not worry over it. There is more than one way to circumvent Mr. Pitcairn; and a few jurymen, more or less, are nothing to fash one's soul about one way or another. Who was the new witness?"

"His name was McGuirk."

"A Hieland body?" Nancy inquired.

"In the service of the duke himself."

"What did he swear to?"

"He swore to Tod's having threated the duke's life, and that Tod had said to him there was a way to even the matter of the raised rent."

"Ah," said Nancy, and there was a bit of admiration in her tone, "the duke's a clever man. In all his law-suiting he finds out just what bit of testimony is needed and gets it."

"If you'll excuse me," she said, rising, "I'll go down and see Meenie, who probably thinks everything in life is over."

As she went over the grass with Jamie, Danvers Carmichael turned an astonished face toward us.

"What is it all about?" he asked.

"It's a long tale," I answered, "which, stripped of its trappings, runs like this: Meenie is Jamie's adopted sister, and the Lapraik man is a sweetheart of hers who owns a bit farm in the Highlands next to Borthwicke Castle——"

"For Heaven's sake," Sandy exclaimed, blowing a cloud of smoke toward the sky, "don't tell that tale again, Jock Stair."

"—And the Duke of Borthwicke wants the farm to add to his land," I went on, unperturbed, "and Lapraik will not sell. So one fine day he is accused of theft by the duke's factor, some of the Montrose silver is found under his roof, and he is arrested and convicted, as you have just heard. Common rumor has it that the duke wants him out of the country—the fact that he was brought to Edinburgh to be tried shows that there is a powerful influence pushing the thing along. Pitcairn is the duke's man of business, which makes the handling of it easier here where he is counsel for the crown."

"It will make it an odd affair if Nancy takes the matter in hand, considering she's Pitcairn's own pupil," Sandy suggested.

"Is it true she's studied the law under Pitcairn?" Danvers inquired.

"Scots and English," I answered.

"In the name of smitten Cæsar," he cried, for that was a word of the time, "what for?"

"We've never come to any settlement of it between us, but your father holds that she studied it to circumvent it," I answered, with a laugh. "She told us once that the more law one knew the safer one could break it."

"I think," Danvers returned, rising and looking away from us to the burn—"I think she needs some one to look after her."

"It has dawned upon us that that was your opinion," Sandy rejoined drolly.

"Lawing with Pitcairn, managing an army

of poor folk on the burn, attending to charities, settling disputes—it's not right. The poor child has a headache all the time, for it's a man's work she's doing. Women are for better things. A woman should save her vitality."

"For what?" asked his father.

"For wifehood and motherhood," Danvers responded.

It sounded like a leaf from Pitcairn's book, but while his whole talk was disrespectful to us as older men, it had a rare manly quality fine to see. In the very midst of it Nancy was with us again, and, minding Danvers Carmichael no more than she did the wooden benches, came over to me.

"I'm going to see the Duke of Borthwicke," said she.

"Is it your intention," I inquired, "to send out scouts for his grace that ye may interview him? I understand him to be a peripatetic body, who travels a great deal in furtherance of his nefarious schemes. He may not even be in Scotland."

"He is in Edinburgh at the moment," she answered, "at the 'Sign of the Blue Thistle.' He has with him his secretary, Donovan; his valet, and two serving-men. They have their lodgment in four rooms on the second floor; he is bid to the ball at the Duchess of Gordon's to-night and at eleven to-morrow leaves in his private coach for the Highlands."

"The Government should employ you, Nancy Stair," Sandy broke in with a laugh. The country is just now needing people who can pick up such accurate information."

"It was no great matter to do," she explained. "When people whose lives are hanging on the duke's acts have been watching him for days they are like to know his movements. I will go to-night, before the ball; and if you'll excuse me now, I'll try to get some rest," and with no further word she left us.

She had scarce turned the box-hedge when Danvers Carmichael gave us a taste of his nature and had his say with us in language free and skirting the profane.

"Suppose," he began, "suppose she goes to see the duke, and suppose, which is far from likely, that she is able to obtain an audience with him, what is there for her to say? She can not very well just call the man a scoundrel! And as for the Lapraik affair, if he has the rascality to do the act, it's not likely that he will flinch at the naming of it."

Getting no answer to this from either of us he went on at white heat, stating in violent and unshaded English the wrong of allowing a girl, little more than a child, to visit a man of the duke's repute, and giving it as his opinion that his father and I were the ones to take the affair upon our shoulders. He even volunteered to visit the duke himself in Tod's behalf.

"And in your own tongue," asked Sandy, "what would ye say when ye got there?"

"Ye might just call him a scoundrel, as ye suggested Nancy's doing. His grace might receive it better coming from a man," I said cheerfully.

"Sit ye down, lad," Sandy said at length; "sit ye down. And stop making a windmill of your arms as ye stand on that rise, or we may think we are all Dutch folk together; and just give over thinking ye know all women, because ye've made love to some senseless London fillies with no brains in their heads whatever. It's a wise man that understands that no two women are alike. John Stair and I have seen something of life in our time, aye, and something of women; but Nancy's a different creature from anything in our ken. Ye might just trust a little to our judgment of her."

If Danvers were abashed by this speech he showed it never a whit, but stood very erect, his brows drawn into a scowl not unlike Nancy's own, glowering first at his father and then at me. Sandy, who was, in his mind's eye, re-rigging a schooner, went on with his paper-and-pencil work, unconscious of his son's scrutiny. I dropped my eyes to the Allan Ramsay, which I had opened at random, but lost nothing of Danvers's conduct, and liked him for it. He had known but the women who needed protection, and his attitude to my mind bespoke the chivalrous gentleman.

"Will she go alone?" he inquired abruptly.

"She will probably take Father Michel."

"And might I inquire without discourtesy who Father Michel is?"

"He is a priest who came up with us from Landgore, and the best man I ever knew," said I. "'Tis he who attends to the burn people."

"And will he tell her what to say to his Grace of Borthwicke?"

"She will not need to be told," I answered.

"Indeed, Dandy Carmichael, this is not the first time she has gone on such errands."

"And does she get her way?"

"She has never failed yet."

"It's true," Danvers went on, "that I've met none of her kind, but if she go to the Duke of Borthwicke, as man to man——"

"She will not go as man to man," Sandy broke in with a smile. "She will go as woman to man. There's a mighty differ."

"You see, Dandy," said I, trying to smooth the talk a bit, "although she's my own, there's sure no harm in my saying that she is an extraordinary creature. That she has great beauty a blind man could see; but that's the least of her, for she has the heart and the principles of the purest and the best. But, oh, laddie, in her dealings with men she has the knowledge of the deil himself. Mayhap she'll cry a bit, or flout the duke, or laugh at his ways. She'll do the thing which she finds his mood and the hour suit, and she'll come away with the pardon in her hand, and say ever after that the duke is maligned and that at heart he is a very good man. And she'll believe it, too."

Dinner without Nancy was a tasteless affair, and we spent little time at table, having the pipes and wine brought into the library. As we sat there the sound of Jamie's violin came sobbing up from the Burnside as he played for his stricken sister in the old low house where three hearts were praying for Nancy Stair. Sitting there with a silence, save for the music, between us, we heard a door open on the floor above and the sound of light footsteps on the stair. She came to the doorway, looked in to see if we were alone, and then, with neither shyness nor self-consciousness, came in to "show us how she looked."

"I've put on my best frock—the one the girls made for me on the burn—in the lace work," she said.

It was cobwebby stuff over white satin, the neck, cut in the free fashion of the time, showing her dimpled shoulders and the turn of the breast. She had dressed her hair in a bunch of curls, high on the head, and over her forehead she wore the circlet of diamonds which my great-grandfather had given to that French ancestress of ours with the uncommendable but frank conduct. Around her neck was the famous necklace of diamonds and emeralds, and at the bosom a cluster of diamonds winked and twinkled at every breath. She stood for one minute near me, her eyes like misty gray stars shining over the bloom of roses, her slender arms bared, and one slight hand, shining with rings, laid on the table.

"Do I look pretty, Jock?" she said, as I raised the little hand to my lips and kissed it, with what a passion of love only he can know whose nature is a tempestuous loving one like mine, and whose only daughter is his sweetheart and his wife.

"Well," she said, satisfied with my expressions, "the coach is at the door," and then, holding out her hand to Danvers, "Will ye not wish me luck, Mr. Carmichael?"

Danvers Carmichael had spoken no word and made no sign since her entrance until he was thus directly addressed, and the three of us turned suddenly toward him as he stood by the chimney-piece. A look of unfettered admiration of her was in his eyes as he answered:

"There's no one wishing you that more than I, Miss Nancy."

Father Michel's grave face looked at us serenely from the coach window for a minute, and we stood on the steps watching them drive away and listening to the horses' hoofs growing fainter and fainter along the outer road.

Before they had died away entirely Danvers turned toward me.

"Lord Stair," he said, "may I call myself so much at home as to ring for a groom? I want my horse. I'm going to ride after her."

"What for?" Sandy inquired.

"To protect her," he answered.

"Well," observed Sandy, dryly, "ye may as well go and be on hand in case there's need of help. Nancy," he added with a laugh, "won't need it. But you may be called in to protect the duke."

CHAPTER X

NANCY VISITS HIS GRACE OF BORTHWICKE

At the time of which I write John Montrose, Duke of Borthwicke, Ardvilarchan, and Drumblaine, was the most noticed man in the Three Kingdoms, and held by many to be the greatest scoundrel in the politics of Europe. He was a picturesque and stately devil, tall, clean shaven, with fine features and damnable light blue eyes with a baffling gleam in them. He had a singular grace in the use of his body, especially in the movement of his hands, which were markedly expressive and attractive; and whether drawn to him or not, one could deny neither his potency nor his distinction of bearing, which was one of race as well as breeding. The first view I ever had of him was in Parliament House, where I noted on the instant the magnificent carriage of his head and chest, his extraordinary pallor, and the strange eyes, reflecting the light from without rather than revealing anything within.

In London, Edinburgh, and Dublin, the tide of gossip overflowed with his name and carried in its current tales of his greatness, his cruelty, his lawless loves and his quick forgettings. It was libeled against him that he had magnetic power over all with whom he came in contact, bending them to his will by the sheer dominance of his presence. There was, I recall, a story rife that upon my Lord Thurlow's opposition to the bill for the restoration of the forfeited estates becoming known, it was the Duke of Borthwicke who was sent to treat with him concerning it, and immediately after this visit the bill passed the House of Lords with small opposition.

It was whispered as well that Pitt himself was afraid of his Grace of Borthwicke, and was no match for the man, who had a peculiar power by reason of being unhampered either by truth or precedent. Blake, who was the duke's secretary in '84, told me at the club one night, that on one occasion his grace had needed some statistics to clinch an argument. After investigation the statistics were found to disprove his point. Upon this being presented to him, he remarked dryly, "Alter the statistics."

Ugly tales were abroad in all classes of society concerning his life in India, his conduct in the Highlands, and his moral idiocy, but he held them under with a strong hand, and more than one hinted that he had eyes for the premiership.

Dressed for the evening, the duke was alone in his sitting-room, attending to his private correspondence, when he heard a rap at the door.

"Enter," he called, in a careless voice, thinking it one of his men.

Nancy lifted the latch and came forward into the room.

"The Duke of Borthwicke will pardon my intrusion, will he not?" she asked, "as well as my lack of courtesy? I was afraid his grace might refuse to see me if I were announced to him in the ordinary manner."

Montrose had been writing at an oaken table, on either side of which was a bracket of lights. At the sound of the voice he turned, and, at the sight of Nancy, he rose and stood looking at her as though she were an apparition.

Many times since, in her description of this interview, she told me that she received from him an impression as though he stretched forth his hand and touched her. She said, as well, that the erectness of his body and the fulness of his chest gave him the air of a conqueror who was invincible, while the pallor of his face and the glitter of his eye set him still further apart from anything usual.

It seemed a full minute that they stood thus taking notes openly of each other before she spoke again.

"I am Nancy Stair," she said quietly.

"Ah," the duke returned, coming forward with a smile, "the verse-maker?"

"I make verses," Nancy answered.

"Which have given me more pleasure than I have the power to tell," the duke responded with a bow.

"It is praise indeed, coming from John Montrose, who is no mean poet himself," Nancy said with a smile.

"I," the duke returned, "am no poet, Mistress Stair; but I have a 'spunk enough of glee' to enjoy the gift of others."

"One might think who overheard us, my lord duke," Nancy broke in with a laugh and the light of humor in her eyes by which she could make another smile at any time, "that we were collegians having a critical discussion. It was not concerning poetry that I came to you to-night, your grace. It was to ask a favor."

"Pitcairn said you would come," the duke answered her blandly, taking out his watch and looking at it with a smile. "He said you would come before you went to the Duchess of Gordon's rout. He even named the exact time within a quarter of an hour."

"Mr. Pitcairn is a very wonderful man," Nancy returned.

"He's a poor hand at description," responded the duke, with a heat of admiration for her in his tone.

"It depends somewhat," said Nancy, "upon what he has the describing of." And in this speech the way women know how to belittle an enemy is clearly to be seen. "He can describe a barn to a farmer, a road to a surveyor, or a church to an architect, so that they fall into an ecstasy of admiration of his parts. When it comes to a woman it's a different matter. Mr. Pitcairn doesn't know a woman. He's not, rightly speaking, a man. As Mr. Carmichael says, 'He's just a head.'"

"It's a curious head," the duke answers, "a curious head and a very clear one."

"A clear head to prosecute; never to defend," Nancy responded; "which leads me to the cause of my visit. I have come to ask for the pardon of Timothy Lapraik."

The duke dropped his eyelids, and a strange light shone from under them.

"You compliment me, Mistress Stair, in thinking I have the power to undo that which was settled by the law of your country and a jury tried and true. I took no part in the affair; the prosecution was not mine; in a word, the thing is perhaps beyond my power, had I the desire to get him a pardon, which, however, I have not."

All this time neither had made any motion toward sitting down, but stood regarding each other, alert and watchful. It was Nancy Stair who took the first move. Coming over to the duke she put one of her hands on his breast and stood looking up at him out of those gray eyes of whose power she was not unconscious.

"My lord," she said, "I, who have had the handling of people much of my life, have learned to recognize power when I see it, and

I see it in you. There's just naught you can't do that you set your mind to."

None ever claimed that in his relation with women the duke was afflicted with Pitcairn's trouble, and a blue heat came in his eye at her touch of him.

"You're not afraid of me, Nancy Stair?"

She looked up at him from under her eyelids and laughed.

"Not the least bit in the world, your grace."

"And ye think, mayhap, that just because ye're a beautiful woman—aye, the most beautiful woman I have ever seen—that ye can come to me and ask favors, thinking that I shall expect nothing in return?"

"What I have heard of you would lead me far from such conclusion," Nancy answered, with a smile.

He looked at her in silence, with an amused expression in his face.

"I like you," he said at length, and a daredevil look came into his eyes, a look which showed at once his strength and his weakness. "I like your fearlessness as well as your honesty. I can mate your frankness by my own. I have long desired to know what is said of me, and have a mind to make a compact with you, if you will. I hear lies on every side. They are the stuff of which my daily bread is baked. Come," he cried, "a bargain between us. The naked truth which ye have heard concerning me in return for the pardon of Timothy Lapraik."

"It's a bargain between us, your grace."

"There will be no slurring over, no soft adjustments?"

"You need have no fear. If you knew me better you would not ask that," Nancy answered with a smile. "You shall have the unsoftened truth, so far as it is mine to speak."

The duke motioned her to a seat by the fire and stood opposite to her, changing the candles on the shelf above to throw the light full upon her face as she sat before the fire.

"'Tis an awkward position you put me in," Nancy laughed.

"'Tis grace itself compared to the awkwardness of mine," the duke returned with a dry smile.

"The first thing I ever heard of you," she began, "was that you were known by common repute as the 'Lying Duke of the Highlands.'"

The duke bowed.

"I have heard from high and low that you have neither the code of a gentleman nor the common honesty of business affairs. It is even argued that you have not the moral perception to see your own lack in such matters."

The duke looked at her steadily for a moment again and his lips curled back into a smile.

"You are openly accused of thefts in India—of defrauding the ignorant natives of their lands."

The duke made a little outward motion with his hand, as though to intimate that these charges were already known to him.

"It is said—and this seems to me one of the worst charges—that you assail the names of those whose places you desire for yourself or your friends, under cover, and in ways impossible for them to circumvent."

The duke shrugged his shoulders as if this charge were one of small moment.

"But 'tis of your treatment of women that the worst stories of you are abroad, and 'tis said that your conduct toward them is that of a brute rather than of a man. There is a tale of one woman, the wife of a baronet, who left her husband for you, and whom ye after deserted to poverty and disgrace."

She paused a moment and turned to recapitulate.

"Liar," she said.

The duke bowed slightly.

"Thief."

The duke bent his head a bit lower.

"Defrauder, blackmailer, and betrayer of women."

The duke rose and made a profound salutation, and Nancy regarded him with a smile.

"I do not think of any other thing," she concluded; and then, as though there was still hope for him, "I have never heard your grace accused of open murder."

"'Tis strange," the duke answered her with a queer look. "I have enough of the artist in me to see that the open murder would have been finely climactic. There is but one of these charges that I desire to deny to you," looking at the fire through his eyeglass as he spoke; "I don't lie," he said, adding, with the shadow of a smile, "I don't have to. And may I ask, Mistress Stair, do you believe these things of me?"

Nancy rose and looked into the fire.

"I like you," she answered.

"In spite of my crimes?"

"Because of your power," she responded.

They stood for a moment regarding each other steadily before another word was spoken.

"Ah, my lord," she said, "I must be going," and there was a shade of regret in her voice, which Borthwicke was not the man to let pass unnoticed, "I have kept my word."

"True," the duke answered, "you have kept your word."

"You will keep yours to me?" she asked, extending her hand.

"By this time to-morrow Lapraik shall be a free man," the duke answered, holding the extended hand in his.

"Thank you," she said, and another silence fell between them as they stood thus, nearer together, dominated by magnetic attraction so strong that a full minute passed unnoted by either.

"It is my turn to ask favors," the duke said headily. "The rose in your breast."

"Shall I fasten it on your coat?" she asked.

So for a moment more they stood almost touching each other, his breath moving the curls of her hair as she reached toward him.

"Good night," he said, extending his hand again.

"Good night," she said, putting hers into it.

"You have your people with you?"

"Yes."

"It is better then I should not come down?"

"Much better," she answered, after a second; and then, turning to him: "You are coming to the Duchess of Gordon's?"

"I had intended to remain away till I saw you. What do you think I shall do now?" his grace asked.

"How should I know, my lord duke?" Nancy inquired, with a smile.

"What do you think I am going to do now?" he repeated with insistence.

"I think you will come to the Gordons'," Nancy answered in a low voice.

"I may kiss your hand?" the duke asked; and, as he did so, the act having in it more of a caress than a salutation, "Believe me," he said, "I could not stay away."

* * * * *

After Nancy and Dandy had left us, Carmichael and I sat smoking, and by reason of the talk falling along some interesting lines we arrived at the Gordons' long past the time set for our party to meet. Nearing the house we heard the music of the fiddles filling the air with glee and sadness, and saw the caddies darting hither and thither, the link-boys with their torches, and the flare of lights on the dazzling toilets of the ladies descending from their chairs and coaches. My own position in Edinburgh society was stated to me quite by accident, as I entered, by a group of young dandies at the ball-room door, who made way for me with a pronounced salute and whispered:

" 'Tis her father."

Jane Gordon welcomed me with a gay and genuine friendship, and as Sandy and I made our salutations to her I saw Nancy at some little distance from us, literally surrounded by fatuous, cipher-faced youths, who stood in some awe before her misty beauty and reputed power. There was pride in me that the girl was mine, a pride which Sandy Carmichael shared with me, and as Hugh Pitcairn crossed the long room to salute her gravely but with marked respect, I saw that there was at least one emotion which they held in common.

Standing by the great window soon after

my arrival, a bit removed from a group of talking persons to whom I was giving but scant attention, I became conscious that some one was addressing me, and turned to find the Duke of Borthwicke, his hand laid lightly on my shoulder, his countenance of baffling serenity, and his voice mellow and of a conciliating quality. He wore gray satin of an elegant finish, but neither embroidery nor jewels, and, notwithstanding his position and power, conveyed the impression in some adroit way, subtler than I can set forth, that he deprecated his temerity in addressing so austere a person as myself. I had seen women use this essence of flattery, but it was the first time I ever found it employed by a man.

"Will my Lord Stair allow me to introduce myself to him?" he inquired, with a smile, extending his hand. "I am John Montrose, and there are many reasons why we should determine to be good friends."

"We are both Highland folk," I answered.

"Which is one excellent reason," he interrupted; "yet there are several more moving than that. Your father, Lord Stair, and mine were out together in the forty-fives, on which side I need scarcely mention; and again, your grandfather and mine both loved and fought for the beautiful Nancy Hamilton, and, but for the preference of the lady herself, she might have been my own grandmother. These things call for a friendly feeling between us, Lord Stair, but that which drives me forward most to your acquaintancy is the admiration I have for the writings of your daughter, Mistress Nancy, whose lines ring through my head more often than I care to tell, and whose poems have been upon my writing-table ever since they were published."

In this pleasant way we fell to talk of Nancy, of her gifts, her beauty, her loving tenderness for all things, her strange up-bringing, her people on the Burnside; and to a doting father such as I was the time flew quickly by.

I noted at length that there was some stir in the circle around her, and watched her cross the room with her Grace of Gordon and Danvers Carmichael in attendance, to the musicians' place in the great window.

I have wondered at times if folk who dwell on the temptations male creatures have think ever of those which come to women of great attractiveness to men. The thought came to me as Nancy took her place beside the harp and violins, which were to accompany her singing, and I sent a prayer to Heaven to keep my child unspotted from the world, uttering it none the less fervently because his Grace of Borthwicke, with lids veiling the fire of his eyes, was looking at her.

Twice she sang, her songs being of her own land, one of the highlands, with the perfume of the gorse and the heather in the lilt of it, and the second, by demand of Sandy, the gipsy song which had been handed down from woodland mother to woodland child for hundreds of years; a song which sent Nancy's lawless blood to her cheeks and set her heart beating with an inherited remembrance of raids and sea-fights, and lawless loves; which made her eyes misty with tears and unawakened passion; the song which I had learned to dread, Marian's song:

"Love that is Life,
Love that is Death,
Love that is mine"——

And as she finished, carried off her feet by her own feelings, she looked toward us for a moment; but it was neither upon me nor Danvers Carmichael that the look fell; for, as one who knows she will be understood, her glance turned to his Grace of Borthwicke, whose eyes told a tale so openly that he who ran might read. I was more disturbed by this occurrence than I cared to admit, and after the supper, when Nancy, attended still by Danvers Carmichael, came back to us, I was glad to hear her say that she wished to go home. His Grace of Borthwicke being still near us, it fell upon me to present Danvers Carmichael to him, an introduction which Dandy acknowledged by a perfunctory bow and scant courtesy, and the duke by turning his eyes for one second in Dandy's direction and repeating his name as "McMichael" in the exasperating manner of one who neither knows nor cares who the person is who has been presented to him; and although at the time of the murder the lawyers tried to have it that the acquaintance between these two men was of London breeding, I can vouch for it, from my own knowledge and the testimony of Danvers Carmichael to me on our way home, that this was the first time he and the duke ever set eyes on each other.

In just the manner in which I have set it forth, in the compass of a few days, the three most important factors in Nancy's life came to the working out of it, Robert Burns, though but by book; Danvers Carmichael, a gentleman; and that splendid devil, John Montrose, Duke of Borthwicke, Ardvilarchan and Drumblaine in the Muirs.

CHAPTER XI

DANVERS CARMICHAEL MAKES A PROPOSAL

WHETHER the conduct of the Duke of Borthwicke brought a climax to the affairs between Danvers and Nancy I can not state for a surety, but the next morning as I sat alone on the south porch the boy came upon me with some suddenness.

"Lord Stair," he said, "it is with my father's knowledge and pleasurable consent that I come to ask your permission to have Nancy for my wife, if she can fancy me as a husband."

He turned very white as he spoke, but his bearing was manly and brave as that of his father's son should be, and my heart went out to him.

"Sit ye down, laddie," I said, "sit ye down. We'll have a smoke together and talk it over. I'm not denying that I like you for the two best reasons in the world. The first, for yourself; and the second, that ye're your father's son. And to pretend that a wedding between you two children would not give me the greatest pleasure in life would be idiot foolishness. I feel it my duty to you, however, as well as to my girl, to talk the thing over plainly. Have you any notion now," I asked, "as to Nancy's feeling toward you?"

"None whatever," he answers, gloomily enough.

"You've not questioned her in any way——"

"I'm a man of honor, Lord Stair," he responded, a bit in the air.

"Well, then," said I, "it will do no harm to set some of the obstacles before you that you may be allowed to deal with the situation barehanded.

"Ye must see, Dandy, that Nancy Stair is different from other women and has been raised in a strange way. I'm no saying it's either a good way or a bad. I am saying that it's far from the accepted way women are bred up generally. It's no mere talent she has—for in a woman that's not harmful and frequently helps to entertain the children, as they come along; but with a girl, raised by men, whose name is ringing throughout the kingdom, who baffles every one by unfailing love and kindness, who has only the religion of making things better for others; a bit of a coquette, with such magnetism that one wants to touch her as one does a flower—I tell ye frankly, Danvers, as Pitcairn says, she's a dangerous contrivance of the Almighty's, and a man had best think many times before he takes her to his bosom as a wife."

"It's a singular state of affairs," Danvers answers, with a short laugh, "and one for which, I venture, even Nancy could find no bookish parallel. You tell me that you'd like me for a son-in-law, but warn me against your own daughter as a wife; while my father takes the other view of it: that he would like Nancy for his daughter, but thinks I'm far from being the one suited to her as a husband. Parents are not usually so dispassionate," he added, somewhat bitterly. I felt for the lad, and took a step along a side path.

"Ye're both over young as yet," I said, "and it's been less than a month since ye've known each other." And it was here that I had a taste of his fine temper, for he turned upon me in a sudden heat that made him splendid and natural to the eye.

"I have not heard that my Lord Stair was over-deliberate in his own wooing," he said.

I laughed aloud as he glowered at me, and put my hand on his shoulder, for I liked his impetuous ways and his deil's temper.

"There, there," I said, "gang your own gate. I but wanted ye to know what ye might expect in a wife. She'll contradict ye——"

"I don't want a wife who is an echo of myself," he retorted.

"She's jealous——"

"I wouldn't give a groat for a woman who wasn't," he responded.

"She is so extravagant," I went on, "that I never let even Sandy know her bills."

He made no answer to this whatever, as though it were a matter beneath discussion.

"She will forget you for days at a time while she's rhyme-making," I went on. "She will be interested in other men until the day she dies—" his eye darkened at this—"and to sum it up, I don't know any woman more unsuited to you; but if she will have you, you've my consent," and I reached out my hand to him.

"God bless you," I cried, and before our hands had parted Sandy came around the turn of the path.

"You've done just what I knew you'd do, Jock Stair," he said, glowering first at his son and then at me, "and ye know as well as I the foolishness of it. Take a man like this lad, who has been spoiled by an overfond mother, and a woman like Nancy, who has had her own way since birth, marry them to each other, and you've a magnificent basis for trouble. Why don't you marry your cousin Isabel? You'd thoughts of it before you left London!" he ended, in a futile way.

"I'm going to marry Nancy Stair, if she'll have me," Danvers replied, doggedly.

"Well, well, she may not have you," Sandy replied, soothingly. "And as she's under the lilacs you may care to join her."

Nothing passed between Danvers and Nancy on the subject of marriage that morning, and I found at luncheon a probable explanation of the fact by reason of her absorption in the labor training idea and the building of an extension on the Burnside.

Between this scheme, her talk of Robert

Burns, her interest in his Grace of Borthwicke, and an absolute and unnatural silence concerning Danvers, I was in some anxiety, and could come to no conclusion whatever concerning the state of her feelings. I mentioned Danvers' good looks, and she quoted me back "The Cotter's Saturday Night." I praised his conduct, and she answered with "The Epistle to Davie." It was the name of Burns that was constantly upon her lips; she set his verses to the music of old songs, singing them softly to herself in the gloaming, and I could see had made a god of him by her own imaginings.

"That Burns book was a bad investment for you," I said to Danvers one evening.

"Why," says he, "it's naught but a book!"

"True," I answered, "but the maker of it is a man—and she's idealized him into a god. Ye just brought trouble for yourself when you brought that volume among us," I cried.

To the best of my recollection it was about a week after my talk with Danvers concerning a marriage between them that the three of us sat at the dinner together, and there never was a more bewitching or dangerous Nancy than we had with us that night. A tender, brilliant, saucy, flattering Nancy, who moved us male creatures about as though we were chessmen.

"Jock, tell about the old minister and the goose," she said. "There's no one can tell that story like you."

Or,

"Danvers, do you recall the anecdote of Billy Deuceace and the opera-singer? It's one of the best jokes I ever heard." And it was after the laugh that followed this narration that Danvers said, with some abruptness, I thought:

"We had bad news to-day. The Honorable Mrs. Erskine and her daughter are coming to Arran. My father invited them over a year ago, and had forgotten all about it when their letter of acceptance came."

"Is it Isabel Erskine whom your father advises you to marry?" Nancy asked.

"It is the very same," Dandy answered with a careless laugh; "and I'm warning you you are to have a rival in the same house with me!"

"Is she pretty?"

"She's well enough," he replied indifferently.

"I believe," said Nancy, looking through her wine-glass far off somewhere, "that she'll suit you better than I."

"She treats me better."

"She doesn't write verses?" this with a glance from under her eyelids.

"She does not."

"Nor think her own way always the best?"

"She's very sweet and yielding, as becomes a woman," Danvers answered teasingly.

"She's just without sin at all," Nancy continued with apparent dejection.

"Entirely," Danvers returned solemnly, but with a laugh shining through his long black lashes.

"Then I'd better not meet with her—I, who have so many failings."

"Have you failings?" Dandy asked, and the teasing tone left him. "I've yet to find them."

And at this Nancy broke into a laugh so funny and contagious that the two of us joined with her.

"Have I failings?" she repeated. "That I have! And so many 'twould be a day's work to name them.

"Sometimes," she began, "I make light of other folks' religion when I disagree with it—

and that's little short of scandalous. And I belittle the people whom I don't like—and there's no breeding in that; and where a friend is concerned I'm like the Stewarts, 'Back to back, and a claymore in each hand,' and——"

"Ye're right in that," Danvers and I broke in like a chorus.

"And sometimes," she went on, and the humor she found in these revelations concerning herself was a droll thing to see, "sometimes I use bad language——"

We men broke into a roar of laughter at this.

"Once, I remember," she said, with the gleam in her eye, "I danced till three in the morning at Peggy MacBride's wedding, and getting out of the coach twisted my arm till I thought I'd broken it. About four of the same morning I rose with a raging tooth, and crossing the room for laudanum, I struck the elbow of the injured arm against a chest of drawers, and before I thought I said——"

"What?" Danvers cried, his face lit up with merriment.

"Nothing will ever make me tell," she said firmly, "nothing!"

"Whatever it was, it was moderate. You

haven't a vocabulary sufficient for that situation, Nancy Stair," I laughed.

"Then, too, I'm no respecter of family," she went on, as though set for complete absolution. "It's mayhap because my own mother was an Irish gipsy——"

"Nancy!" Dandy cried with amazement.

"She was so," Nancy insisted, "and the present lord's grandfather was a strange old cummer who ran away with another man's wife——"

"Nancy!" I expostulated, "Nancy, you mustn't talk in that way of your forbears——"

"Why not?" she inquired.

"It's a thing ye can't explain, my dear; but it just isn't done," Dandy said.

"Is it not?" she asked, and there was a look in her eyes of amused amazement. "Is it not? You see, I, in my poor blind way, can not understand why the naming of a thing is worse than the being of it—but if ye say it is, I'm amiable. I'll give out that my forbears were all kings and queens of the Egyptians, and that I ate my haggis when I was a child from the seat of the throne. It makes no difference to me, for I'm something more than the Laird of Stair's daughter."

"Meaning the future Countess of Glenmore, mayhap?" I suggested.

"I'm not meaning any such thing, and it's perhaps not becoming for me to explain what I do mean; but whether I say it of myself or 'tis said of me in the Glasgow Sentinel, it makes little differ, for I have the verse-making, and 'tis more to me than lands or titles.

"Aye," she said, after a pause, with a laugh as though making fun of her conceit of herself, "I have the genius——"

At the end of the meal, before she left us, bewildered by her vivacity and charm, she stopped at the door.

"Am I nice?" she asked.

"Very," said Danvers and I.

"And will ye give me," she asked, as a child might have done, "the thousand pounds for Father Michel?"

"I will not," I answered, the yielding in me showing through the words.

Danvers saw his chance and took it with the spur.

"I will," he said, going toward her to open the door, but it looked more as though he meant to take her in his arms, "I will, Nancy."

She looked at him with a softness in her eyes.

"Thank you, Danvers," she said, and the glance made me think that, even did I allow such a manifest impossibility, he could never have invested money in any way to bring him a richer return.

It was a task beyond me to get sensible talk from him with Nancy waiting in the moonlight, a moonlight fragrant with honeysuckle and climbing roses; and I bade him to be off to her; and I opened the papers which had come by a late post.

I heard a merry talk between them as Huey came in to say that the white night-flowers were in bloom by the fountain, and I went off with him to have a look at them. As I came back I turned into the path which led to the porch, intending to tell them of these wonderful blooms, when I saw the two of them on the steps, standing near together, and Danvers's arms were around the girl he loved, and he was looking down into her eyes with rapture in his fond, handsome face, and I heard him say:

"When, when, *when?*"

"When do you want it?" she asked.

"When do I want it! Now, to-night," and he drew her lips to his.

"Wife!" he said.

When I reentered the library I found it occupied by Sandy, who had walked across country from his own place with some news concerning the whisky tax. As we sat in dispute over it, upward of an hour later, I heard Nancy go to her room without coming in to wish us a good night, and a second later Danvers Carmichael stood in the doorway. It was good for us older men to see the lad, and at the sight of him I was out under the stars of Landgore; the sound of gipsy singing, the salt from the sea, and the odor of blown hawthorn were in the room, and I was young again with Marian Ingarrach folded in my arms. The brooding look was gone from his eyes and his face bore a strange illumination. He had added something to, rather than lost any of the cock-sureness of his manner; but the happiness of him, combined with the love and passion of his ardent nature, made him a singularly handsome creature as he came toward us.

"Will you not congratulate me?" he said, looking from one to the other of us.

"Is she willing to marry you?" his father asked, with exaggerated amazement.

"If she finds none whom she fancies more, she said she would marry me within the year——"

"Well, well, there's some hope for you," Sandy went on. "She may meet in with some one else."

"You've my pity," I laughed, but I took his hand in mine with the words.

His joy radiated itself to us, and his talk was just as it should be for his years. He patronized us a bit for being older and out of the way of it all, spoke of Nancy as though she were the only woman since Eve, and discussed a betrothal ring as though it were a thing for empires to rise and fall by.

"She fancies rubies; she cares for gems, you know," he said, as though the information was new to us instead of having been anciently and expensively bought.

He must have the best ruby in Scotland, he went on. He wished he could attend to the matter himself. "But," he stood with his thumbs in the arms of his waistcoat as he spoke, with a conscious smile—"but no fellow would be such a bally ass as to dash to London for a ring under present conditions." There were the four thousand pounds his grandmother had given him. They might all be spent for this. There was a fellow named Billy Deuceace, an Oxford man, with taste in such matters. He would write him concerning it to-night, he said.

"Faith," said Sandy, drolly, "you talk as if married life were all a ring. Ye'll find it different when your wife has the genius and is taken up wi' other men."

And Danvers faced the two of us here by a statement which has never left me from the night he uttered it till the minute of my setting it down.

"I am far from believing," he said, "that genius is a thing which rightly belongs to women. 'Tis to me but an issue on one side. And the woman who has enough of her husband's kisses and his babies at her breast has little time to write verses or think of other men."

With these words still ringing in my ears I rapped at Nancy's door on my way to bed, to find her sitting by a glaring light with the everlasting Burns book in her hand. I was a bit dashed in spirit by her occupation, for it seemed unnatural that a girl should be spending the time immediately after her betrothal in such an employ, and I affected a gaiety I was far from feeling.

"Is it to Nancy Stair or the possible Countess of Glenmore that I speak?"

She stood by the table, her finger still marking her place in the book.

"Dandy told you, then?" she asked.

"Told us!" I echoed. "It's my opinion he'll tell the town-crier to-night and have it in all the prints of the realm within the week."

"He told you just what the understanding was?"

I repeated what he had said, and she nodded at the end in acquiescence.

"You see," she said, coming toward me and putting her head on my shoulder, "I'm not sure of myself. My mind's ill redd up for marriage with any one. I've had too much freedom, perhaps; and while one side of my nature, probably the strongest one, loves Danvers Carmichael, I am drawn to the writer of these lines, this Burns man, in a way I can not tell; and at the very foot of the matter I am mightily taken up with the power of John Montrose. It's no highly moral, is it?" she asked, with an amused smile, "to feel ye could be in love with two—three men at once? But my nature's many sided, and on one of these sides I find a most 'treacherous inclination' toward his Grace of Borthwicke."

CHAPTER XII

I MEET A GREAT MAN

"With knowledge so vast and with judgment so strong
No man with the half of them e'er could go wrong;
With passion so potent, and fancies so bright,
No man with the half of them e'er could go right."

I PASSED as miserable a night as my worst enemy could have wished and was up at the dawning for a jaunt in the open. The gowans so white and bonny were swinging their dewy heads in the morning wind; the sea-fog was lifting skyward, and whether the message came from them I can not say, but a mystical white word floated between me and my troubled thoughts of Nancy—a word which means the changing of baser metal into pure gold, the returning of the balance to nature, the fine adjustment of spirit to mind and body—the great word Motherhood. Nancy as a mother. My Little Flower with a floweret of her own might be the solution of a happy marriage for her more than compensating for the independence and adulation which she had always had.

As I tramped along I came to a definite thought concerning the Burns poems as well, which was that I would set fire to them, as if by accident, that very day, and have them by and done with. And as for the man himself, it would, I thought, be no hard matter to keep him out of our lives; in which conclusions I left out just two things—the throw of Fate, which none of us can reckon upon, and my own rhyme-loving nature and fondness for being entertained.

It was Fate's throw with which I had to reckon first. I had come in my musings to a side-path which led from the old Abbey to the foot-bridge, when I heard the sound of a man's singing:

> "As I cam in by Glenap,
> I met wi' an ancient woman,
> Who told me to cheer my heart up
> For the best of my days were comin'."

The singer was sitting upon a fallen tree, beside a smoking fire, with the women, children, aye, and the very dogs, gathered about him as though he carried a charm. He was a thick-set man, dark and swarthy, with a pair of eyes literally glowing. His hat was cocked upon the back of his head, and he had his plaid thrown around him in a certain manner known to himself alone. He was eating and drinking with these gipsy-folk, for he'd a bannock in one hand and a mug of hot drink in the other, but at sight of me he set them down and came forward to greet me; and my amazed eyes rested on Robert Burns himself, as though raised up by some of his own witches to fit into my thoughts—Robert Burns whom I had met at Mauchline before he was famous, the year before.

He inquired if I were stepping townward, and on the instant I asked him to breakfast with me at the Star and Garter, and this, you will remember, within five short minutes of my resolve to burn his book and keep him out of our lives.

It was charged against me later that I was lax in this Burns affair and, because of my own infatuation for men of parts, took too little thought for the temptation to which I exposed my daughter. I answer the accusation by telling the circumstances exactly as they fell, and he who reads may judge the truth of these charges for himself. As we came to the door of the inn, I asked Creech and Dundas, who happened to be passing, to join us at the breakfast, and a merry feast it was, and one for the three of us to hold as a lifelong memory, for only those who had the honor to know Burns could understand that the "best of him was in his talk." In the year of which I write all the eyes of Edinburgh were fixed upon him, and his toasts, his epigrams, his love affairs were the scandal of the town and his own countryside. There was some flouting of him at this very meal, I recall, by Creech, who was deep in his affairs, concerning a Mauchline lassie who had thrown his love back at him with some violence and scandal; but he was not in the least dashed either by the event or the naming of it, and, seizing a glass, he called out, with the jolliest laugh in the world:

"Their tricks and crafts hae put me daft,
They've ta'en me in—and a' that,
But clear your decks! and here's 'The Sex,'
I like the jades for a' that,"——

the applause which greeted this sally bringing the servants to the window, though, in fact, when it was known that Burns was in the house there was no keeping them out of the room.

I do not feel, even at this late day, that I need an excuse for the admiration I have of Burns, the greatest poet, in my judgment, who ever lived. I knew his faults, if faults they were, but, before God, I knew his temptations as well, and can speak with greatest thankfulness of one he put behind him.

Pastor Muirkirk, of the New Light, in one of his more relaxed moments, said to me:

"The Lord cast seven devils out of the man in the scriptures because his nature was big enough to hold seven devils. Most of us, laddie," he went on, "are not big enough to hold half a devil," which explains the thought I have of Burns to a nicety, for it was surely the very bigness of his nature, the instant sympathy with all who lived, which brought many of the troubles to him for which he has been greatly blamed. But this can be said of him: that no man I ever knew, from the highest lord in the land down, presented himself to the world in a saner or more balanced manner. I have known him to breakfast with tramps at an ale-house in the morning, walk arm in arm with a duke down High Street in the afternoon, and leave him perchance to dine with some poor country acquaintance up from Ayr for a day's buying.

It was after Creech and his friend had left us that Burns turned toward me.

" There is a matter upon which I am undecided whether it is good taste for me to speak to you, Lord Stair," he said, " but there is such sincerity of admiration at the root of it that ye'll can just be forgiving me if I trespass on your sense of the proprieties. 'Tis of your daughter, Mistress Stair. I was carried off my feet by her singing at the charity ball, and the verses she writes are as unstudied as the song of a lark. But she will never write a poem that is so great as herself. All her accomplishments seem to me but a set of warbles or trills to the true song of her great womanhood. ' Where she is,' " he quoted prettily, " ' man will be more than his wont, because of her belief.' "

And at these words my resolutions were clean forgotten in my pride in his praises of her.

" She wants to know you, Mr. Burns. Your book is by her day and night," I cried, at which he looked flattered, but said he was for Ayr that afternoon, and the pleasure of an acquaintance with her must be put by until some later date.

I told him at this that a friend had invited us down to his part of the country for the fair, where we might meet again, on which he took a slip from his pocket, putting his Edinburgh address on one side of it, like this:

"It is in the house of Mrs. Carfrae, Baxter Close, Town market: first scale-stair on the left hand going down; first door on the stair,"

and on the other:

"To Mistress Nancy, Mistress Stair,
At Mauchline race or Mauchline fair,
I shall be glad to meet you there.
We'll give one night's discharge to care,
If we forgither,
And have 'a-swap-of-rhyming-ware,'
With ane anither."

And it was this "swap o' rhyming ware" which brought about the tragedy toward which I draw.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DUKE VISITS STAIR FOR THE FIRST TIME

On my return to Stair I found Nancy on the south steps with a letter in her hand. In her white frock, with her hair bobbing in a bunch of curls on the top of her head, she looked scarce older than the day I had found her there "making verses" years agone.

"You went away," she said, with reproach in her tone.

"Guess whom I fell in with," I answered.

She hesitated a minute.

"Robin," said I.

"Robin who?" she inquired.

"Who but Robin Burns?"

"Oh, did ye?" she cried, her face aglow on the instant; "did ye, Jock? Why didn't ye bring him back with ye?"

"He's for Ayr this afternoon," I answered; "but he sent a word to ye," and I gave her the card in Burns' own hand.

"That's funny," she said, putting it in the bosom of her gown, and she went on after a bit of musing, "if he swap his rhyming ware for mine it will be a losing bargain for him."

Before I had time to answer, Dandy Carmichael came in view with a troop of dogs at his heels, and at sight of him I recalled an arrangement made the evening before to have a tea drinking on the lawn, and that he was bidden to luncheon to help with the cards of invitation.

The rest of the day was spent with pen and ink and address books, and this jostle of circumstance put the Burns meeting out of my mind entirely, nor did I mention it to Danvers one way or another, which turned out to be a more unfortunate occurrence than I can tell.

On the day set for the festivity Danvers came early, with the Arran grooms behind him carrying flowers from the conservatories for the decoration of the great hall, and all of the morning the house was filled with gay young voices and merry preparations for the entertainment of friends. Stands of scarlet droopers were set on the porch, the hot-house flowers being placed against the tapestry and the old armor; bowls of drink were brewed and set to cool, and two o'clock found Dame Dickenson in sober black silk, with a canny eye for the refreshments, and myself in black as well, and a state of what might be described as pleasurable anxiety.

Dandy's last words to Nancy before leaving to bring the Erskines back with him were these: "You are to look your very best; I desire the Hon. Mrs. Erskine struck mute with admiration," and when she came down the stairs I could but think that she had taken his counsel to heart, whether because she was to meet "her rival," as she laughingly called Isabel Erskine, or by reason of the expected presence of his Grace of Borthwicke, I was far from deciding.

She wore a huge black hat and a black lace gown, with a kerchief tied in front and falling near to the ground. Her gloves were black as well, coming almost to the shoulder, her only touch of color being a cluster of roses in the knot of lace upon her bosom.

"How handsome you are, Jock Stair," she said, coming toward me. "How handsome you are! I did well when I selected you for a father," she finished with a laugh.

The Arran party were among the first to arrive, and in spite of the restless character of the entertainment I found time for a short talk with Isabel Erskine, a modishly attired, fair girl, with round blue eyes and many meaningless phrases, for which I saw no necessity. She had one sincere emotion in her life, however; one which she took small pains to conceal, and this was an infatuation for Danvers Carmichael.

It was he who presented the two young women to each other, and I noted with pride the bearing of my daughter at this meeting, for she was genuinely glad to meet Miss Erskine, and with much gentleness and gravity explained the reasons which had prevented her from coming over the day before to pay her respects. Isabel, who was not at her ease, responded that Danvers had told them how busy every one was at Stair, and that the omission of a visit on Nancy's part was, under the circumstances, but natural.

That Isabel Erskine did not like Nancy I knew on the instant I saw them together, and that Nancy was unaware of it, and would have cared nothing about her dislike had she known of it, was a thing of which I was equally certain.

The pretty picture of the gaily gowned ladies with their furbelows and parasols in shifting groups under the beeches, the sunlight falling through the leaves in broken golden shapes upon the shining silks and satins of the dresses, the merry chatter of the younger folk and the more demure coquetry of the older ones, are still a pleasant picture in my memory of that far-by day.

Upon a demand from some of the guests to see the "lace school," and the labor teaching as well, Danvers took it on himself to act as conductor of these merry inquisitive parties, and the wonder and interest of the ladies in the school was remarkable to see; and I recall now that Mrs. Opie made her first visit to the burn that afternoon, and within a month had planned her written work concerning it.

It was nearly four before the Duke of Borthwicke arrived, Hugh Pitcairn and Sir Patrick Sullivan coming with him, unannounced, through the west entrance.

His grace looked younger than he did at the time of our last meeting; but his eyes were the same; misty, unholy, and bland. He wore gray cloth of the same accented plainness, and from the time of his entrance stood with his head uncovered in an attitude of great deference to the women-folk; a bearing which accorded poorly with the tales afloat concerning the manner of his private life.

To us, who for the most part knew London but by name, the bearing of this celebrated personage was a matter for interest and study, and if it were in my power to set him forth as he showed himself to us that day there would be none of fair judgment who could blame Nancy for her conduct toward him afterword. I can affirm that never from the moment that his eyes fell on her did he remove them from her face. He was accosted by several gentlemen in his progress toward us, but it was with a fixed glance of absorbed admiration of her that he answered them, curtly, as I thought, and as one who brooks no interruption.

Crossing the space toward us he came alone, the forward poise of the body, and more than all the power of his head and chest, fixing the idea I already had of a splendid kind of devil who would make ill-fortune for any who crossed him.

"It is a great pleasure to see you again," he said, bowing low before Nancy.

"You have been away a long time," she answered.

"The longest month that I have ever spent," he returned.

"The Highlands were not merry?" she asked.

"I had no heart for them."

"No?" she said. "I am sorry."

"I should rather, were it mine to choose, that you were glad to have me find them dull," he answered.

"Would that be quite friendly?" she inquired, with a smile of intentional misunderstanding.

"I am scarce asking for friendship," he returned, and there was no mistaking the intent of either word or eye.

"By the way," he continued, "I have ridden half over Scotland and laid by four horses to be here this afternoon; for which," he added, with the little outward wave of his hand which became him so well, "I am claiming no merit;

for is there a man who knows you who would have done otherwise?"

A look passed between them, a look which I was at a complete loss to understand, as she answered, with a laugh:

"I think Mr. Pitcairn might successfully have struggled with the temptation of laming horses to see me."

"But," the duke retorted, "as you told me yourself on that memorable night we first met, 'Pitcairn's not rightly a man; he's just a head.'"

"In many ways," responded Nancy, and her eyelids drooped at her own audacity, "in many ways he reminds me of you, your grace!"

The duke smiled back at her with a little drawing together of the eyelids, which I had learned to know so well.

"I have," he said, "nearly a fortnight to spend in Edinburgh, in which I shall make it the effort of my life to show you the difference between us."

CHAPTER XIV

NANCY MEETS HER RIVAL

It was the morning after the outdoor party that Danvers came into the breakfast-room with a pleasant excitement showing in his face.

"I've a present for you," he said, going over to Nancy, who had not left the table.

"For me?" she asked.

"For you—though I'm far from sure that you deserve it, for if there's a man in Edinburgh this morning whom ye haven't in love with ye, he's blind. However," he laughed, "we'll waive that," and he took a box from his pocket and held it above his head.

"Will ye kiss me for it?" he cried.

"I will not," said she decisively.

"Then you sha'n't have it," he said with great determination, moving as though to put it in his pocket.

"I'll go and write some letters, then," she remarked calmly, starting toward the door.

Afraid of losing her society for the morning, mayhap, he put the box on the table and pushed it toward her.

It was a small silver case, strong and firm, with a smaller box of white velvet inside, in which lay a ruby ring—a gem for which men commit crimes and women sin; a gorgeous, sparkling, rosy stone, sending rainbow spots upon the wall, and rendering Nancy radiant and speechless as she slipped it on her finger.

"Is it for me, Dand?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"For whom else would it be, Little Girl?" he answered, and the delight he had in her pleasure was a beautiful and husband-like thing to see.

"But why?" she asked. "Can I take it from him, Jock Stair?" she said, turning to me suddenly.

"A woman can surely take a gift from her future husband with no impropriety," I answered.

"That's true," she said; "but you see there is no betrothal between us, and at the year's end I might have to send it back for some other woman to wear, which would go far toward bringing me to my grave. I am afraid I can't take it yet, Danvers."

"Wear it," he answers. "If ye can't wear it as my betrothed wife, wear it in sign that I love you. Lord Stair hears that I hold it as token of nothing save my own love for you. If it gives you pleasure, Nancy, it's all I ask." At which she did the thing least expected of her by putting her head suddenly down on her hands and bursting into a flood of tears.

"Oh," she cried, "these things are just putting me out of my mind. I wish I was in Heaven, where there is no marrying or giving in marriage!"

There was one point gained, however, for she wore the ring; and with it upon her finger Danvers could never be kept long from her thoughts.

At luncheon of this same day, old Janet McGillavorich, from Mauchline, whom Nancy ranked the chiefest of all her female friends, surprised us by a visit. She was a far-removed cousin of Sandy's, who was constantly back and forth between her own home and Edinburgh by reason of her everlasting lawing.

It seems that her father had left her some property, and by the advices of Hugh Pitcairn she had turned this to great advantage, owning bits of land all over Scotland, from Solway side to John o' Groats.

She was a masculine-looking female, with hair of no particular shade parted over a face very red in color, and with high cheekbones and small gray eyes set at an angle like the Chinese folks. She was above sixty years of age at this time, with a terrible honesty of conduct, great violence of language, and carried things with a high hand wherever she went.

Having heard of Nancy from Hugh Pitcairn four or five years before this, she had demanded to make her acquaintance, upon which Hugh fetched her over to tea one afternoon, and from that time forth she bore an unending grudge against me, that Nancy was not her own.

"And so ye write," she had asked at this first interview; "I never read anything ye wrote, but I'm glad to meet in with any woman who has an aim 'beyond suckling fools and chronicling small-beer.' But ye must be careful what ye write, my dear," she went on, "or ye'll have the whole female population of Scotland clattering after ye. Be orthodox, and never trifle with tales concerning the seventh command. Stick to rhymes like 'fountain and mountain' and 'airy and fairy,' and such like things; for ye'll find that the women who tell tales that would make ye blush, who lead dissolute, unthinking lives, who deceive their husbands, and smell themselves up with Lily-of-the-Valley-water when they go to the kirk, will be the hardest upon ye if ye stray from any accepted thought. They require the correctest thinking in print ye know!"

I never saw Nancy more pleased with any human being than with this fire-eating old lady; and when Janet finished her discourse by the statement, "God be praised! I never read poetry. Shakespeare sickened me of that. This thing of not saying right out what you mean turns my stomach. Padding out some lines to make them a bit longer, and chopping off ends of words to make others shorter, ought to be beneath any reasoning creature." Nancy put her head on the table and laughed until I was afraid she would make herself ill.

It was after the luncheon, while Janet was still with us, that the Hon. Mrs. Erskine and her daughter came to pay us a visit of congratulation on the success of our entertainment. Danvers had gone off to walk, and so it fell upon the three of us to receive these visitors in the music-room, where we were having tea.

The elder lady, whom Sandy insisted had come to Edinburgh to marry me, was an intentional female, with much hair, much rouge, and a pallor heightened by rice-powder, which gave her a very floury and unclean appearance. Her eyes were an indescribable color, resembling the pulp of a grape, and near-set, a thing which I have never been able to abide in man, woman, or child. Her nose was long and peaked, and her mouth dropped at the corners. But it was the strange set of her whole figure which struck my notice again and again. For she was, to use a lumbering expression, all in front of her spine, with neither backward curve to her head, nor her shoulders nor hips, which gave her a peculiarly unpliable appearance. Her voice was high and of a singular penetrating quality, and she had an over-civil manner to us, as of one who has something to gain. Her gown, of blue, had many strange kinds of trimming which seemed both needless and inexpressive, and what with the rouge and the chains and hangings around her neck, she reminded me of nothing so much as a grotesque figure for a Christmas-tree decoration.

When it be added to all of this that she had a fearful habit of emphasizing certain words in a senseless and flippant style, and of waving a lace kerchief constantly, after the manner of a flag, it may be imagined with what joy I relished her society.

"Ah!" she said, "you are alone after the party. What a success it was! A positive triumph, positive! Isabel and I had been told how delightful Edinburgh society was, but we were not prepared for the gaiety we found. It was charming! Positively charming! And how beautiful you looked, my dear," she went on, turning to Nancy. "Of course we'd heard of you—every one in any society at all has heard of you, you know; but you've such style, my dear—positively the belle-air, positively!

"I know you're pleased to hear how your daughter is adored, aren't you, Lord Stair? It's what I say to the dear duchess (the Duchess of Mont Flathers, you know—we're just like sisters!). 'Maria,' I say to her, 'of course I am pleased to have Isabel the rage, as she is —it's only natural, she being my daughter, that I should feel so.' I am enchanted at all the attention she receives, and at the way men rave over her. It's a mother's feeling. One night, I recall, when Danvers Carmichael had positively compromised Isabel by his attentions, for he's always after her, the dear duchess said to me:

"'Anne, this is going too far!' And I said:

"'Dearest, it may be; but I have no heart to stop them. They both look so happy.' And the duchess replied:

"'Anne, your feelings do you credit; and I think it's so sweet and womanly to be so honest about it.'

"'We naturally like to have our children beloved,' I answered, stiffly.

"That's just what I say all of the time!" she went on, as though some one might stop her by a speech of his own. "Just what I say, Lord Stair; both to Alexander Carmichael and his son. How beautiful, how very beautiful the friendship between you is. And between your children as well! Danvers is quite like a brother to your daughter, isn't he?

"I really believe—now don't contradict me," she said, waving her handkerchief at her daughter. "I really believe that Isabel was inclined to be jealous yesterday. Danvers has always been so devoted to her—always, since she was quite a little, little girl; and I am afraid—just a tiny morsel afraid—that it was hard for her to share him.

"Not that you were to blame, dearest," she said, turning to Nancy, "not the very least bit in the world. It was quite plain who claimed your time! Quite plain! His Grace of Borthwicke is positively the most fascinating creature I ever saw—positively. We never can get him in London at all; so I never took my eyes from him; and all the town bowing before him—and he absolutely on his knees before you, my dear! Absolutely!

"Pardon me for mentioning it—forgive me, won't you?—but what a beautiful, exquisite ring! Look, Isabel! Quite like an engagement ring. Now could it—I wonder—could it," peering at it and then at Nancy through her glasses—Nancy, whose eyes had the significant darkness in them which I have mentioned so often.

"It is not an engagement ring," she answered quietly.

And here Janet, who had watched the Hon. Mrs. Erskine in much the same manner as she would have regarded a foolish old cat, came into the talk.

"Since you think so highly of Danvers, Mrs. Erskine, ye must say a good word for him to Nancy Stair. He's my choice for her to marry," she said, looking around with a bland smile.

"And does he want to marry her?" Mrs. Erskine asked, abashed by this directness.

"He told me that he had asked her three times a day ever since they met, and I, for one, hope that she'll think twenty times of him to once she thinks of that devilish John Montrose."

I cared nothing for the silly old Mrs. Erskine, but my heart bled for her daughter, who became a piteous white at the turn the talk had taken, and put her handkerchief to her face, affecting a cough. Nancy saw this and her heart spoke.

"Dandy Carmichael," she says, "talks to you, Mrs. MacGillavorich, to please ye—you lay too much stress by what he says."

But the italicizing lady was routed, and as Janet watched her departure from the window she said:

"Mark my words, John Stair! she's fetched that girl here to marry her to Danvers Carmichael. I've not known Anne Erskine all these years for nothing. The old cat!" she cried.

CHAPTER XV

CONCERNING DANVERS CARMICHAEL AND HIS GRACE OF BORTHWICKE

It was from the time of the garden party on that Danvers Carmichael and his Grace of Borthwicke were, to speak rudely, walking into each other at every turn of Stair, and it is a task beyond me to tell the strain which came into our affairs with the entrance of Montrose.

Subtle, subtle, subtle! It was the word which followed him everywhere, and it was as difficult to manage him as to handle quicksilver. He flattered with a contradiction; saw nothing unmeant for him to see; bent to the judgment of him with whom he talked; was supple in speech; modest, even to the point of regarding himself as a somewhat humorous failure; told long stories with something of a stagelike jauntiness, of fights in his boyhood, in India, in the

House of Lords—and by his own telling was ever the one worsted, the one upon whom the laugh had turned.

For myself, I confessed openly then, as I do now, that I found him the most diverting person I have ever met, and took such pleasure in his company that upon me should rest much of the dirdum of having him at Stair.

There were two things, however, which annoyed me no little concerning his frequent visits to my home. The first of these was the attitude toward him of Father Michel. I was coming out of the new chapel with his grace one morning when we encountered the good father, and I was struck with amazement to see the duke grow suddenly white and give a start backward, with a quick indrawing of the breath which made a choking sound in his throat, and that Father Michel on the instant seemed as a stone man, save for the eyes, which, if I were anything of an interpreter, showed a live hate and an old-time grudge. During this meeting, which was brief to abruptness, Father Michel spoke no word, but bowed low at the first silence which fell between us, taking his way down the braeside upon such business as he had in hand,

and no questions were asked after his departure concerning either his origin or his labors, for the duke was ever one who knew the protective power of silence.

After this encounter between them I played a clumsy detective in proving that the two avoided each other and that there had been some interwovenness of interests in the past. Several times when I asked Father Michel to join us at table he gave me flimsy excuses, and once the duke pleaded indisposition when I proposed that he should accompany Father Michel on an inspection of some stained glass which Nancy was having put in the altar windows of the new chapel.

In many ways, therefore, I became fixed in a belief that there was hatred in Father Michel for John Montrose, and a distaste for the good father in the Duke of Borthwicke, such as a man might cherish against one whom he has greatly wronged.

The second trouble, however, was more acute, for it involved the duke's treatment of Dandy Carmichael. While we were of a party Montrose was civil enough, but when the two of them were thrown together the duke would relapse into an insulting silence, such as one carries in the presence of servants; would require to be spoken to twice before answering a question, as though his thoughts were far away; would even hum to himself as though entirely alone; or put the cap to his insolence by taking a book from his pocket and reading, sometimes even marking the rhythm of a verse aloud. So from day to day there was growing a hatred for the duke in Danvers by reason of his jealousy and the accumulative discourtesy which he was obliged to endure.

As for Nancy's conduct to the two of them, if it seemed strange to me, who was her father, it was but natural that it should require some explanation to those less partial to her, and she had the whole town talking over which was the favored suitor. She rode with his grace in the morning, played at billiards with Danvers in the afternoon, perhaps to be off in the evening with McMurtree of Ainswere, who was maudlin in his infatuation for her and whom she pronounced the best dancer out of France.

There were seasons when I could have sworn that she had no thought save for Danvers. I have known her to watch for his coming, to grow restless if his visits were a bit later than expected, to regard him with happy and glowing eyes, and to rest in his presence in a way that flattered him and drew him to her with such a passion of love showing in his fine face that I had joy in the mere sight of him. But these times would pass, and mayhap in a week or less she would be at the Latinity with the duke, heated in her enthusiasm for him, encouraging him in his tale-telling, with gleaming eyes and audacious rejoinders. At these times Dandy fell back for company upon his cousin Isabel, and I have met them frequently riding or driving together, she with a happy, radiant face, and he with the brooding devil in his eye and a sullen look in the smile with which he greeted me.

In his frequent absences from Edinburgh the duke never allowed Nancy's thoughts to wander from him long. A book by special post, an exquisite volume of Fergusson, hand-printed, some foreign posies in a pot, an invitation to come with a party of his English friends to the Highlands, and he added:

"I am sending the list of the guests to your Royal Highness, and if there be some who are not to your liking, I pray you cross them off. Following here," he went on, "the custom usual when one invites Royalty to one's home," playing all the moves which a man knows who has wooed and won many times, but, as it seemed to me, with a real feeling in the game.

At this sort of thing Dandy was a poor rival by reason of his pride, and matters were at something like a gloomy standstill between him and Nancy when I called Sandy into consultation.

"Tragedy will come of it," I cried at length; "but by my hope of Heaven I know no way to handle the affair. Deny the duke the house, and what have ye done to a girl of spirit? Urged her into his arms, and nothing else——"

Sandy's talk was all on Nancy's side, however, which made the situation a bit easier for me.

"You see, it's thiswise with most women," said he. "Give them a husband to dandle them, and some children for them to dandle themselves, and a house to potter round, with some baubles to wear when they're young, and some money in the bank when they're old, and they go along with small agitation of mind until the grave. Not that I'm discounting their value. They're a good conservative element to society, and God intended them for the reproduction of the race, and perhaps they're kept stupid in their minds so that they will not rebel against their manifest destiny.

"It's not like this with Mistress Stair! For she has a grasp of things, and the fearlessness of an unbroken colt, and a mind for the big thoughts of life, and you and I have led her forward in her conduct.

"In the matter of Danvers she is following out the strongest law that we know. 'Tis the natural attraction of the sexes—of the young for the young; but her mind calls for something besides. And 'tis here the duke appeals to her more. Aye! it's all a difficult business," he concluded, "and fate will have to settle it after all, as I've said many a time."

One day when the Little Flower was by me with her sewing I put the matter to her with what deftness I could. Her answers were brief, but directly aimed at the text. She said in effect that marriage was a serious affair, and that she had been bred up with so much liberty that it made the embarking on such an expedition more perilous to her than to most women. She also set forth that in nearly every other enterprise in life one might take a preliminary jaunt, and finding the business little to one's liking, might give it over and start without prejudice in some other.

"In this one affair alone," she ended, "the one of most moment in all of our existence, there is no retracing one's steps with honor if it be found that one has taken the wrong road."

For these reasons she averred it her privilege to look around her with all the intelligence she had in order to make no mistake, both for herself and her future husband.

"For I'm thinking," she said, "there would be trouble afoot if I found, after marriage, the love of which I am capable given over to a man who was not my husband.

"Besides which," she laughed, "I'm not certain whom I am going to marry. There's Robert Burns, now," she cried. "How would you like to have a plowman for a son-in-law, Jock Stair, my daddy O?" and she started off to the Burnside, singing as she went; which was all I could get from her on the subject, one way or another.

It was near the end of September that there began the serious trouble between the duke and Danvers. I was come around from Zachary Twombly's mill, where I had been to pay the hop-pickers, riding alone through the Dead Man's Holm, intending to enter the garden by the break in the south wall. Doubts of the wisdom of the way this child of mine had been reared were going over and over in my mind. I had indeed aimed to make her the finely elemental thing which I conceived a real woman to be; but I found with some perturbation of spirit that the plan would have served better for the general happiness if the men with whom she had to deal had been less accustomed to the conventional woman. They were forever drawing conclusions from her actions which would have held with sound logic had they been applied to any other woman, but with Nancy they were frequently as little to the point as if they had been drawn from the conduct of a Chinese lady.

Thinking these things over, I came by the group of pear-trees, at which point I heard voices on the other side of the wall, and raising myself in the stirrups looked over into the garden.

It was a sunny, warm corner, and a low table, with some chairs, had been placed there, together with a basket of lace-work which Nancy had evidently been overlooking. She was not to be seen, however, although her flowered hat hung on the back of a chair near by.

Sitting before the table was Danvers Carmichael, the cards spread before him, making a solitaire, and at a little distance, holding the bridle of his gray horse, stood the Duke of Borthwicke, who, I judge, had interrupted by his entrance a morning talk between Danvers and Nancy. There was a peculiar gleam in the eyes of Montrose, and a jaunty self-possession which became him well, as he stood and looked down at the man whose temper he had surely tried to the breaking point.

"'Tis a lonesome game you play, Mr. Carmichael," he said, with a significance in his tone which the printed words can not convey.

"There are times when I prefer lonesomeness to the only company available," Danvers returned, and he raised his eyes from the cards and looked Montrose full in the eye as he said it.

"Ah," the duke murmured, and there was a shadow of a smile around his lips, "'tis fortunate to be so pliable. For myself I prefer to play a game with a partner. In fact, the solitariness of my life has been such that I have thought to change it. To be frank with you, I am thinking of marriage."

"The Three Kingdoms will be interested," Danvers returned suavely.

Again the duke smiled. "You compliment me," he said, with a bow. "It all depends on the lady now. There is for me no longer any power of choice; for I think none could see her but to love her," and here he raised his hat with something of a theater's gallantry. "It is Mistress Stair, of course, of whom I speak."

Dandy Carmichael was on his feet in a minute.

"It is but fair to you, your Grace of Borthwicke, to tell you that Mistress Nancy Stair is already bespoken."

"Indeed?" said the duke. "And whom shall I believe? The lady herself denies it."

"She has promised that if she sees none

within the year whom she likes better she will be my wife."

"Ah," returned the duke, and again there was a smile. "Am I to gather, then, that Mr. Carmichael considers himself so attractive that he believes it impossible the lady should find, in a whole year, one whom she could prefer?"

There was in the tone that which no man of spirit could have borne, least of all Danvers Carmichael, who knew that for two months the path of the duke had been leading up to this, and there was no hesitation in him. He held several of the unplayed cards in his hand and he struck the duke across the mouth with them.

"Since you are wanting a quarrel, I'll give you cause for one," he said, and I joyed to hear him say it.

Borthwicke took his kerchief from his pocket and drew it across his lips.

"My friends will wait upon you," he said.

"They will be welcomed," Danvers answered, and as the words were spoken I saw Nancy come from the porch door holding a book in her hand, and I rode hastily to the main entrance rather than to place further present embarrassment upon them by having them fear that I had overheard the quarrel between them.

If the duke showed any change whatever in his manner of greeting me it was to appear a bit more frank and careless than ordinary, his voice a trifle smoother, and his countenance more open than I had ever noted it before. He asked me to ride to town with him to look at some old prints which he was for purchasing, and, as we rode off together, turned toward me as a schoolboy might have done, inquiring:

"Did you ever have an old song go over and over in your head, without rhyme or reason, Lord Stair?"

"Many's the time," I answered.

"This morning," he continued, "I woke with one of these attacks, which are o'er frequent with me, and a bit of a rhyme of one of my father's serving-men has been ranting through my brain all the day," and here he broke forth and sang:

"I hae been a devil the most of life,
  O, but the rue grows bonny wi' thyme,
But I ne'er was in hell till I met wi' my wife,
  And the thyme it is withered and rue is in prime."

"'Tis an up-country tune," I answered in words, but my thought was one of wonderment that a man who had just planned and set on foot the taking of another's life should be so gay and could talk so interestedly on trivial affairs.

Whatever other faults may be mine, indirectness of speech nor a slothful gait when something has to be done were never accredited to me, and I determined to let the duke know exactly what I had heard, as well as my opinion of him in the business which he had stirred up. Turning toward him, with no introduction to the matter whatever, I said:

"Your grace, I am a man old enough to be your father; something of a philosopher and a dreamer, who has let the current of this world's affairs swim by him unnoted for many years—another, more dependent on present issues, might hesitate to speak to a man of such power as yourself in the manner which I have planned to do; but I would forever lose my own self-respect, which I state honestly is of far greater value to me than any opinion which you or another may have of me, if at this time I failed to be open with you. I was an unintentional observer of the scene which just occurred between you and Mr. Carmichael—one in which, to my thinking, you showed to monstrous poor advantage."

If he had denied, or stormed, or affected a hurt honor at the words, they would have but fallen in with the idea I had of him. He did none of these; but, turning, said to me openly and as one in no wise affronted:

"I hate the man for the best reason on earth, Lord Stair."

"And is it your way to try to kill all you hate?"

"Oh, no," he answered, "it is not often necessary."

I can not set down the ease with which he spoke, for it seemed to me that I was listening to some theatric person behind the footlights making a speech to the pit rather than to a man who was as earnest as a man could well be.

"The truth at the root of the whole trouble is that Mr. Carmichael and I have the misfortune to love the same woman.

"I have wanted for some time to have a private talk with you, Lord Stair," he continued. “If your time is at your command, will you do me the honor to have a bottle of wine with me at the Red Cock, where we can talk with something more of ease?”

Ten minutes from that we were seated by a window of the inn, the duke on one side of a table with a bottle of his own, I on the other with a bottle of mine, while he, with a frankness impossible to a less gifted person, was dazzling me by his wisdom and his wickedness.

I wish it were possible for me to put down the gesture, the grace of language, the lightness of touch, the deliberate choice of one word over another, with which this talk was flowered; but I can, at least, state that it had to me a living kind of deviltry in it that raised me out of my surroundings, as a play or great music might have done, or the clash of some great event.

“I was a poor boy,” the duke began, “at fourteen, a poor Highland body with estates in a begging condition, and a sickly frame—a stoop and haggled lungs, but something, *something* within me that would not down, that would accept no defeat. I made this body of mine over. I trained myself until I could endure hardship like the Indians and bear pain like a stoic. It took four years of my life for this, and it was upon its completion that I began to mend the fortunes of the family. I looked out into the world with more cynical eyes than generally do the observing boys of my age, and found self-interest to be the lever which moves the human thing we call man. *Man!*" he cried, with a laugh. "Lord! there aren't ten men in England to-day, or do you think I would be where I am? There was shamelessness, even a touch of villainy in my creed; but it was, after all, admirably adapted to the folk with whom I had to deal. But with my fortune and my increase of power my ambition rose higher and higher. I could handle men at my will; but I began to ask myself questions as to the use of doing it at all. I was honest with myself, and I saw, I think, clearly that I got my power by using the *worst* in men.

"Well, my lord, I met your daughter, and it seemed to me I found she had a better power than my own. As I have said, my ambition is boundless. I desire always the best. I believe she is a fine philosopher, she can win at my own game. Oh," he interrupted himself, "I would not be setting it out to you that it's my head alone she's touched, for I am as daft in my love for her as any schoolboy could be, but I'm just telling you that, both from my ambition and my love, I want her for my wife.

"The first thing," he went on, "which I have to face beside yourself is this Carmichael man. If I had met him in any other relation in life I should have forgotten him within a fortnight; but he has been forced upon my notice—there are things about him I can not understand."

"They are his principles, perhaps," I suggested dryly.

The duke laughed aloud.

"That was worthy of Mistress Stair herself," he said, his eyes filled with laughter.

"It all comes to this in the end, John Montrose—if you know anything of women. If ye kill Dandy Carmichael you need never expect to see Nancy's face again. The boy is one of her first remembrances, and his father is almost as dear to her as I am myself. What kind of place are you making with her to kill one who, by all old ties, has become dear?"

"I've no intention of killing him," he said. "I intend to let him have a thrust at me with his sword, and then get him sent from the country for it."

I saw his plan in a minute.

"And suppose I tell Nancy what ye've just told me?" I cried.

He leaned across the table and touched me lightly on the shoulder.

"That is my power," he said, "my knowledge of people. I know your code, Lord Stair, and though I were the greatest scoundrel on earth, 'tis not in you to betray the confidence which I have reposed in you, even to help a friend."

CHAPTER XVI

NANCY STAIR ARRANGES MATTERS

I RODE back to Stair, having accomplished nothing whatever with the duke, sick at heart and baffled completely by the shameless honesty of the man. Whiles I made up my mind to ride on to Arran and tell Sandy of the whole matter, and next to find Dand and see what common sense might do with him, though his deil's temper argued against any satisfaction being obtained by this move.

As I turned into the policy I was met by one of the grooms, who rode in some haste with a letter in the band of his hat. Instinct told me that his errand was relative to the trouble brewing, and I immediately jumped at a conclusion, which was that Nancy had heard of the quarrel and had sent for one or other of her fire-eating friends to come to her.

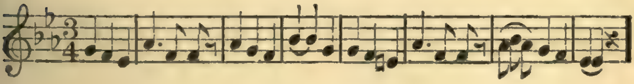
With no small interest, therefore, I watched the man close the Holm gate and set off at a breakneck speed toward Edinburgh, where the duke lay.

At the dinner I asked Nancy what she had been doing in my absence.

"I read some Fergusson and some of the rhymes of that idiot King James VI, and then I went over Mr. Pitcairn's indictment of Mungo Armstrong. Jock, it is written with the fairness of the judge himself. It is great work! He's a wonderful man, Pitcairn!" which occupations surely showed no great perturbation of mind.

After the meal she told me that she had sent for the duke "concerning some matters," and I lay on the leather couch in the hall, the very same bit of furniture, by the way, which we called Pitcairn's sofa, which made a bitter time for us all later, and fell asleep.

I was recalled to consciousness by singing in the grounds, and although the whole town knew the song, it was the first time I had ever heard it—"The Duke's Tune," it was called far and wide:



at the last note of which, Borthwicke himself, jaunty, bareheaded, and smiling, stood before Nancy in the window-way.

"How is your Royal Highness to-night?" he cried gaily.

"My Royal Highness," she replied, with a little laugh, "is not in a happy frame of mind. Things have gone very wrong with me to-day."

"Indeed?" returned his grace. "Things may be changed by human endeavor. I myself," very lightly, "have been able to change a few. It is perhaps superfluous for me to mention that my time and abilities are at your service always."

"If that be true, my troubles have disappeared entirely," Nancy returned. "They were all of your breeding. I have been thinking of your grace the day long."

"I am honored," he said.

"Perhaps you should know my thoughts before you say that. They were not complimentary in the extreme," she said, looking directly at him with very honest eyes.

"You might," and there was the caressing tone in his voice of which I have already spoken, "tell me wherein I displease you. It would be the effort of my life to change."

He came directly toward her at this, o'er close, it seemed to me, and stood looking down into her eyes, which were fixed upon his.

"You mean it?" she asked.

"By the love I bear you, the best thing my life has ever known—I mean it to the last letter. In fact, I spoke of it this afternoon to your father, Lord Stair. You've made a change in me. I'm not promising too much, but I am intending a reform of myself. Let me put it to you, not too earnestly, lest nothing come of it, but so you can get the drift of my thoughts.

"I have come to believe that your creed of love and helpfulness to every one is a stronger one than mine. It is not a proven thing to me yet, but I think one gets more in a subtler way than I can name from living by it. My head has got me so far in the working out of it. My heart——"

"Your heart will help you the most," said Nancy. "And it is there I am hoping for help from you." And here, perhaps to avoid the avowal which she felt might be coming, she took a tangent:

"Will your new wisdom carry you so far as to write a letter for me, one with your signature at the bottom?"

"It will," his grace answered, without a second's hesitation seating himself at the writing-table.

"It is for you to dictate it," he went on, with the paper spread before him, pen in hand.

"My dear Mr. Carmichael," Nancy began.

His grace started to his feet—this was far from anything for which he was prepared. So for a space they regarded each other steadily, and then I saw Nancy put her soft little hand over the one of the duke's which rested on the table; and his smile and movement of the shoulders, as though he surrendered everything at her touch, was one of the bravest bits of love-making I have ever seen.

He seated himself again, and Nancy, standing at his side, went on:

"I am writing to you to-night to ask your pardon for the entirely unworthy course which I have pursued toward you during the past six weeks."

Again the duke paused, and I could see his jaw set as he regarded the words, which were bitter enough to his palate.

"The matters which led to the quarrel between us were of my own breeding, and I wish to apologize to you for them. Sign it," said Nancy.

"I am willing," the duke answered, with an odd smile; "but, little girl, a man doesn't insult another man and then crawl out of the consequences of his act by letter. Have I your permission to effect this thing in a bit more masculine way? I promise a retraction of my conduct, and that I shall be humble enough——"

"And there will be no duel?"

"There will be no duel," Borthwicke answered, and, subtle creature that he was, he saw by the look in Nancy's face how much his yielding had gained for him with her, and seized the occasion.

"I have done this for you, as I might do any other thing for you which you might ask me, for there's one thing I want more than my life itself. "Oh," he cried, and he reached out his arms toward her, "can you love me, Nancy Stair? Do you think you can love me?"

There was a pause, during which I could hear the duke's deep breathing, before she answered him.

"And that's just the thing I can't tell," she said, "for I don't know myself. You know the understanding that I have with Danvers Carmichael. I am fond of him, perhaps fonder of him than any other; but there is no disguising the fact from myself that at times you attract me more."

The duke laughed aloud in spite of the strain of the moment.

"You are an honest little soul," he cried, with genuine appreciation.

"I try to be," she answered.

"Well, well," he went on, temporizing, "a year is a year. We shall see. But in the meantime, my sins are forgiven me?"

"Entirely," she answered.

"There is usually some token of forgiveness, is there not?" he went on, as he stood, erect, hypnotic, and compelling, looking down at her.

She did the thing for which he was least prepared, by putting her hand lightly on his forehead for an instant.

"Te absolvo," she said, after the manner of the church.

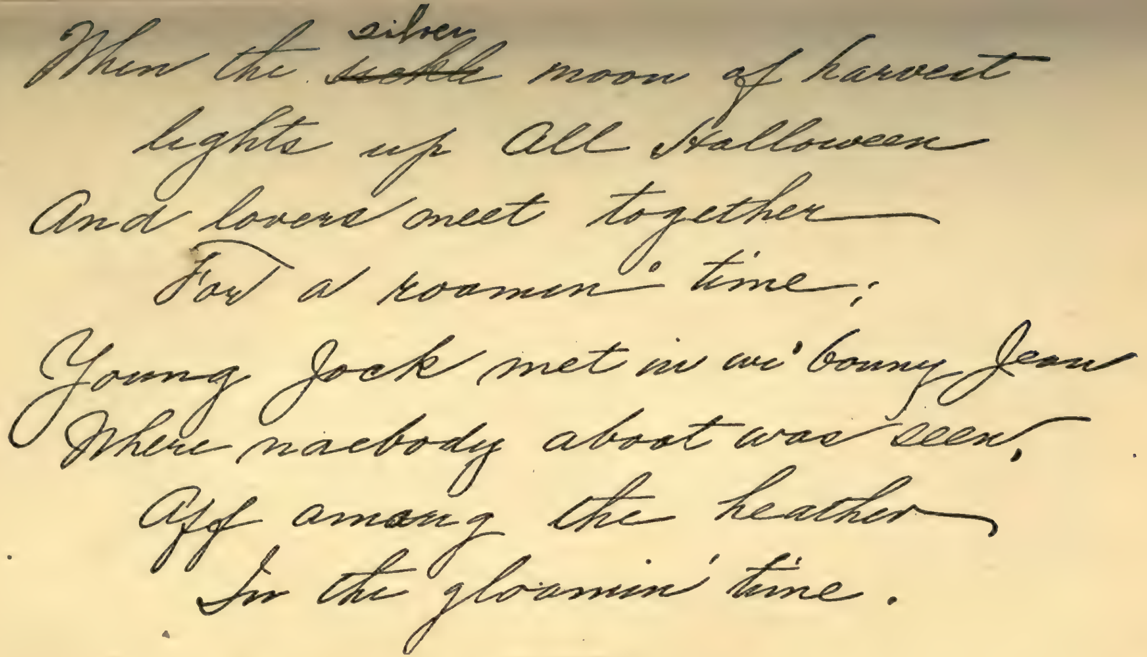
And although one could see that he was disappointed, he smiled at her, and the smile had something in it of pleasure, too, for he of all men was surely the one to believe that "the fruit which could fall without shaking was ever too mellow" for him, and enjoyed, to mix a metaphor, the pleasures of the chase.

Although the trouble seemed to pass by in this happy fashion, I had so little faith in his Grace of Borthwicke that, the morning for which I knew the duel had been set, I rose early and rode by the Old Bridge Road to see if anything concerning it were on foot.

Finding nothing but the silence of the morning and a few country folk on the way to market, I rode on to the town, where to my astonishment I came into the midst of a party just leaving the Star and Garter with evidences of conviviality plain upon them. The first I saw were Billy Deuceace and Sir Patrick Sullivan, and behind them Danvers, Dr. McMurtrie, Stewart of MacBrides, and his Grace of Borthwicke, all of them seemingly upon the best of terms with each other and themselves, leaving me to ride back to breakfast at Stair with the first appetite I had had for hard upon a week.

In the afternoon of that same day I met Billy Deuceace, and after some questioning, which showed the knowledge I had of the matter, he said:

"It was a compact between us that the affair should die in silence, but I think I can say to you, Lord Stair, in honor, that his grace behaved most handsomely in the matter—most handsomely," he repeated.



When the ~~sofle~~ silver moon of harvest
lights up All Halloween
And lovers meet together
For a roamin' time;
Young Jock met in wi' bonny Jean
Where naebody aboot was seen,
Aff among the heather
In the gloamin' time.

FACSIMILE.

Poems by Nancy Stair, Pailey Collection.

CHAPTER XVII

"THE SWAP O' RHYMING WARE"

The day following this event I was called into the Mearns to look after some property which by reason of an entail had been thrust into my hands. Nancy had planned to accompany me, but the post brought her news that a German cousin of royalty, who was making a tour of the country, was intending a visit to the lace-making place on the Burnside, and Father Michel's word being for her presence at Stair, she gave over the trip, and watched me set off with Hugh Pitcairn, a bit saddened, I thought, at the pleasure of the jaunt being taken from her.

"A fine lassie!" Hugh said, looking back at her from the coach window, "who will do what's right, as she sees it, whether she gains or loses by it herself. A woman whose word can be believed as another's oath; who has a thought for the general good, apart from her own emotions; with something of the old Roman in her sense of justice. Ah," he went on in his egotism, "she shows training. All women should be taught the law—something might be made of them then."

I was employed in looking over some unread mail which I had with me while Hugh was laying these flattering unctions to his soul, and came at this point upon a letter from one Hastings, an American from the village of Boston in South America, offering in a kind sure way to marry my daughter Nancy if he could have my consent. He was a flat-faced, bigoted Anglo-Saxon, and a creature seemingly designed to drive a woman of any wideness of judgment into a frenzy, and I grinned with delight as I handed the letter to Hugh for his perusal.

He read it stolidly and returned it to me, uncommented upon, but further down the road I could see he was turning Nancy's affairs over in his mind, for he broke out, with some disjointedness:

"I have always held it a wise arrangement of nature to make women of notable mentality of a dry and unseductive nature, and pretty women fools; for if one person held beauty and charm as well as power and grasp, there is no telling but she could overthrow governments and work a wide and general mischief. We've much to thank God for," he continued, "that Nancy Stair is as she is."

The third day of my stay at Alton I received a special post which put me into some fret of mind. The letter was from Nancy, and is set below entire:

"MY VERY DEAREST:

"I miss you and am lonesome; for the lady is not coming about the lace-making, although she sent a command for many pounds' worth of work, and Father Michel is much pleasured by that.

"I have just had a letter from Janet McGillavorich. 'Seeing that ye write,' she says, 'ye may be interested in a plowman-poet that we have down here, whose name has made some noise in this part of the country. His name is Burns, an Ayr man, and the gentry are a' makin' much of him. Well, any time ye've the fancy, ye can look out of the spence window and see heedless Rab Burns, his eyes a-shine like twa stars, coming over the braeside, drunk as a laird, roaring out, 'How are thy servants, blessed, O Lord,' having spent the night Gude alane kens wheer. God kens and most of the neighbors, too, when you come to think about it, for the lad has a Biblical shamelessness for his misdeeds, and what he forgets to tell himself (and that's little enough) he goes home and writes out for all the parish to read. So if ye'd like a crack wi' him, just come right down, now your father's left ye, and I'll have him till dinner with you, and you can bob at each ither to your heart's content.'

"Isn't it strange, Jock, that a thing I have wanted so long should just happen by, as it were? And so I'm off for Mauchline to-morrow, with Dickenson, whose silence bespeaks a shrewish disapproval, and will write how Mr. Burns and I get on at some soon date.

"Give my love to Mr. Pitcairn, and tell him the prints are full of his new book.

"Danvers Carmichael has not been here since the time you know of, and the Duke of

Borthwicke is on some sudden business to the Highlands.

"With my heart held in my hands toward you,

"Your own child,

Nancy Stair

In a green tabby velvet, laced with silver, and a huge feathered hat, Nancy set out from Stair about eight in the morning with Dame Dickenson in the Stair coach, driven by Patsy MacColl. By a change of horse at Balregal, she arrived at Mauchline just as the lamplighter was going his rounds, and the coach was turning by the manse when a serving-man, evidently heavy with the business, came toward the vehicle, signalling.

"Are ye for Mrs. McGillavorich?" cries he

"Ay," Patsy answered.

"Well, I'm put here to tell ye that her house fell into the cellar of itself the morn, and she's at the 'King's Arms,' where 'tis her wish your young lady should be fetched at once."

Amazed at this sudden announcement, Patsy drove a short distance farther, where, as directed by the stranger, he stopped before a small two-story dwelling, unpretentious, but exceedingly clean and respectable in appearance, where Mrs. Todd, the landlady, showed Nancy into the living room.

It was a quaint old chamber, with wooden walls, beamed ceiling and a great stone fireplace, the lugs coming out on each side to form a seat, with candles lighted in a row upon the mantel-shelf. There was a spinet in one corner; a set of shelves filled with shining cups and saucers between the low white-curtained windows; while a fire from huge logs filled the chimney place and threw a dancing light over the polished floor, half hidden by a thick homespun carpet, and as was the custom of the time, lighted candles had been set between the drawn white curtains to guide any uncertain traveller to his destination.

When Nancy entered, blinded by the sudden light, it was her thought that the apartment was empty, but here the devil had taken his throw in the game, for sitting in the far corner at a small table, with a jug and writing materials between them, were two men, the darker of whom would every little while scribble something off, handing that which he had written to the other, who would roar aloud and clap him on the shoulder, and both would drink again.

Nancy stood irresolute before the fire, not knowing what to do, when the darker man came forward from his place, as though to offer assistance, but at sight of her he drew back in amazement, and as Mrs. Todd bustled into the room at the moment, with many courtesies, to escort her up to Mrs. McGillavorich, no word passed between the two; but the man stood watching after her as she ascended the winding stairs.

"We're in a frightful state, my dear," Mrs. McGillavorich cried to her from the landing. "A frightful state. But the house went down too late to let ye know that for your own comfort ye'd best stay at home. We'll make ourselves comfortable here; and I've ordered a chicken pie for you, which is browned to a turn, and a jelly stir-about; and this evening we'll have a merry time, for they say Burns is in the house this instant."

"Ah," she went on, peering from the window, "ye got here just in the nick of time; for the wind's roaring from the west, and when a storm comes from that direction it's like to set by us for a long time."

After the supper, served in her own apartment, was by with, the strange old lady went on:

"And now we'll go down to the spence, where ye can meet Mr. Burns. And because your father's a kent man in these parts and your own name sounding through the country as well, I'll give out that ye're my niece, and it's in that way ye can be known."

So, attended by Dickenson, carrying her many wraps and comforters, with Nancy following, Mrs. McGillavorich entered upon Burns and his companion, whom they found drinking and writing exactly as Nancy had left them.

"I'd like to make you known to my niece, Miss Gillavorich," said Mrs. Janet, advancing toward him. "From Edinburgh," she added.

He threw a hasty unconvinced glance at Nancy, but bowed low as one used to gentle ways.

"I am new come from Edinburgh myself," he said, after presenting his friend, whom he named Mr. Hamilton. "It's a braw town. Have ye lived there long?" he asked.

"Some years," Nancy answered; "although I was not born there."

"There are fine country places all about it, too," he continued, "out the Pentland way."

"Yes," she answered; "I've seen them."

"And do you know many people in the city? I've met in with some notable folk on my sojourn there. The Monboddos, the Glencairns, and the Gordons are grand people."

"I've heard their names," Nancy returned, in a non-commital way.

"They've been kind to me," he went on, with a bit of conceit in his manner, "most kind. The ladies especially," he added.

"So?" said Nancy. "That must be very comforting to you," she added, with a twinkle in her eye.

"It is," was the unexpected answer, given with a droll look. "And I like to hear them sing my songs. Have ye heard Bonnie Dundee? It's not printed yet."

"No," she answered, "but I could catch it.

I sing a little. Could ye sooth it to me, Mr. Burns?"

"Nay, nay," said Janet, "no music or singing yet; not till Mr. Burns has given us something of his own. We'll have Dickenson brew us a bowl of lemon punch, and we'll draw the curtains and gather the fire, and Mr. Burns will line us the Cotter's Saturday Night, the sensiblest thing writ for a long time, before ye sing us a song, my dear."

And the old lady being set, there was nothing to do but to abide her way of it; and thus by the fire, with the elements raising a din outside, the five of them listened to the great man, who was not too great, however, to turn the whole battery of his compelling personality upon Nancy Stair, nor to look at her from the uplifted region in which he dwelt during the recital to see what effect he had upon her, for he had already learned "his power over ladies of quality."

God knows if any of those, even Burns himself, who were gathered about the fire that night dreamed that, as I believe now, those lines would echo down the ages, nor that the time was coming when that evening might be a thing to boast upon and hand the memory of to children and to children's children as a precious heirloom:

"November chill blaws loud wi' angry sugh:
The shortening winter-day is at its close;
The miry beasts retreating frae the pleugh,
The black'ning trains o'craws to their repose:——"

And at the end, fed perhaps by the adulation of their faces, as well as their spoken words, he laid some open flattery to himself upon the way he'd been received in town and at the noise his name was making there at the time, and stirred Nancy's sense of humor, which, Heaven is a witness, needed little to move it at any time.

"A'weel, a'weel," she said at length, "I make verses myself, Mr. Burns."

"Say you so?" he cried; "and that's a surprise to me! Would you word us one of your poems?" he asked, laughingly.

"I sing mine," she says, going over to the spinet.

"And that's finer still!" he cried.

"They're not like yours," an apology in her voice; "just off-hand rhymes like, that come to my head on the moment. If you could sooth me Bonnie Dundee now, I might rhyme something to it," and the minute he began, she said:

"Oh! I know that—'tis an old tune, like this"—and striking a chord or two, she was off before the rest had any guess of her intention, with a merry devil in her eye and her face glowing like a flower in the firelight:

"At 'The King's Arms' in Mauchline, Rab Burns said to me,
'I'm just back from Edinbro' as you may see,
Where all the gay world has been bowin' to me,
For I am the lad who wrote *Bonnie Dundee!*
And just for a smile or a glance of my eye
The lassies are ready to lie down and die;
So don't give yourself airs, but just bow before me,
For I am the lad who wrote *Bonnie Dundee!*'

"Now a'weel, Mr. Burns, I have somewhat to say
I've sweethearts as many as you any day;
And I've eyes of my own, as you've noticed, maybe,
If you've glanced from the author of *Bonnie Dundee!*
And Duncan of Monteith my suitor has been,
And Stewart of MacBride's, who has served to the Queen,
And if any one bows, it will sure not be me,
For I don't give a groat who wrote *Bonnie Dundee!*"

The laugh which followed this found Burns at her side, every passion in his inflammable nature alight.

"Aye," he cried, "ye have the verse makin'.

But the e's are easy. Why didn't ye try the Doon. 'Tis as celebrate."

"Sure," she answered. "there are rhymes begging for that. Tune, soon, rune, June——"

"And loon," Burns threw in, daffing with her. "Ye wouldn't be forgetting that."

"It was not my intention to be leaving the author of the piece out of it," she threw back at him, laughing, at which Burns gave her a look.

"You'd better mend your manners," he cried, gaily, "or some day I'll take my pen in hand to you, and *then*, may the Lord have mercy on your soul!" adding low, "*Mistress Nancy Stair!*"

Some consternation followed upon this, for it was unknown by any of them that he had seen Nancy in Edinbro', and after the talk was readjusted a bit to the news, the five of them, with Mrs. Todd listening on the other side of the door, sat till hard upon one o'clock, with uplifted minds, insensible to time or weather.

The extreme disorder caused by the wind, for the storm had risen, at length recalled them to themselves, and Mrs. Todd, who worshiped the great poet, came in.

"You must lie here to-night, Mr. Burns," she said hospitably; and as the poet lighted Nancy up the stair:

"Good night," he cried, "good night!" and then, because there was a devil in the man whenever he looked at a pretty woman, "I'll have no sleep to-night. I'm in some far-up region where poems are made and where all the women are like you!"

For three days the horrid weather kept them housebound; three days in which Nancy and Robert Burns lived in dangerous nearness to each other, considering her youth, her temperament, and the passion of admiration which she held for him; three days of poetry and folk-tales and ballad-singing, with the man's dangerous magnetism at work between them.

It was on the afternoon of this third day that a girl passed the window near which Burns sat, and beckoning to him, he slammed out into the storm, with no prefacing word to his act whatever, leaving Nancy staring after him in amazement, as she said to Mr. Hamilton:

"Do you not think his manners are strange?"

"The Edinburgh people say that he had them straight from his Maker," Mr. Hamilton answered, evading an opinion of his own.

"It's no saying much for the breeding of the Almighty," she answered, off-hand, with a smile, and she held silence concerning the matter, although it was near upon four days before Burns entered the inn door again, his face pale and haggard, his eyes sunken, and lines of dissipation upon his handsome face, which every one by courtesy passed over uncommented. He brought a volume of Shenstone with him, which he laid before Nancy as a gift.

"I am bringing you one of the great of the earth," he said, gloomily regarding the book, and Nancy, who read his thoughts and wanted from the heart to cheer him, said:

"I whiles wonder at you, Mr. Burns, and the way you go about admiring every tinker-peddler who tosses a rhyme together. Ye've no sense of your own value at times. Do you know," she went on, fair glorious to see in her enthusiasm glowering down at him—"Do you know that when this man Shenstone's grave is as flat to the earth as my hand, and his name forgot, people will be building monuments to you and raising schools for your memory.

Why," she cried, in an ecstasy, "'tis you that have made our old mother Scotland able to hold up her head and look the whole world in the face when the word 'Poetry' is called."

"Ye think so?" he asked, the tears big in his eyes, his gloom put behind him. "It's music to hear ye praise me so," and he rose and leaned against the mantel-shelf, his face irradiated by its usual expression.

"Perhaps," he began with some hope, "when I say farewell to rakery once and for all, I may make something fine yet. Most men, Mistress Stair, shake hands with that irresponsible wench called Pleasure, but I have dallied too long, I fear, in her intoxicating society. Aye!" he finished, "Wisdom's late upon the road!" *

"Let's make a poem of it! It sounds like one!" she cried, moving toward the spinet.

"Take your own gate," says Burns, laughing; "I'll follow!"

"I'll take the first lines," she said gayly. "'Twill throw the brunt of the rhyming on you."

"You're o'er thoughtful," Burns laughed

---

* It is strange to note that there is scarce a word spoken by Burns in all of Lord Stair's manuscript which can not be found directly or indirectly in the poet's prose or verse.—Editor.

back at her, and Nancy began rhyming to an old tune the thought they had passed between them, with Burns ready with his rhymes before her lines were entirely spoken:

Nancy

"At break o' day, one morn o' May,
While dew lay silverin' all the lea";

Burns

"A lassie fair, wi' gowden hair
Came laughing up the glen to me."

Nancy

"Her face was like the hawthorn bloom,
Her eyes twa violets in a mist,"

Burns

"Her lips were roses of the June,
The sweetest lips that e'er were kissed."

Nancy

"'O, what's your name and where's your hame?
My sweetest lassie, tell me true.'"

Burns

"'My name is Pleasure,' sir, she said,
'And I hae come to live with you.'"

Nancy

"She took my face between her hands,
And sat her down upon my knee."

Burns

"She put her glowing lips to mine,
And oh, but life was sweet to me."

Nancy

"Wi' mony a song we roved along
My arm all warm about her waist."

Burns

"The hours drunk wi' love's golden wine
Unheeded ane anither chased."

"Ah!" Nancy cried here, "That's the Burns touch! I could never have done that!"

Nancy

"Her hair's gay gold, in many a fold,
Unheeded on my shoulder lay."

Burns

"Her heart beat on my very own,
And life and love were one that day."

Nancy

"When noon was highest up in air,
An ancient man came on the road."

Burns

"And when he saw my loving fair,
His eyes wi' fiercest anger glowed."

Nancy

"'And who is this,' he cried to me,
'That you have ta'en wi' you to dwell?'"

Burns

"'Her name is Pleasure,' sir, said I,
'And oh, I'm sure she loves me well.'"

Nancy

"'Rise up,' he cried, 'no more defer
To leave a wench not over nice.'"

Burns

"'She's Pleasure till ye wed wi' her,
Her name she changes then to Vice.'"

Nancy

"I got me up from where I lay,
And turned me toward the darkened land."

Burns

"'Adieu,' she said, wi' no dismay,
And waved toward me her lily hand."

. . . .

Nancy

"The time was set, and then we met,
Old Wisdom came, and now we part."

Burns

"'Ye gang your gate, ye'll soon forget,
Nor think,' said she, 'twill break my heart.'"

Nancy

"'There's something strong within ye both,
That's makes ye tire of such as me."

Burns

"'But I'm as I was made,' she quoth,
'And how much better, sirs, are ye?'"

"There's a deal of philosophy in that," cried Hamilton. "I must have a copy."

And it was from his paper that I got the lines as I set them above.

CHAPTER XVIII

I GO DOWN TO MAUCHLINE

Of all this rhyming gaiety, it will be remembered, I had no knowledge at the time, being still at Alton, chafing under the business in hand, and awaiting each post, as the days went by, with a beating heart and the expectancy of some unworded trouble.

The twelfth day passing without news, I cut the end of my business off altogether, and started for Stair, it being my thought that Nancy's visiting would be ended and that I should find her there awaiting my return. The home-coming was a dreary one, the house darkened and unsociably redd up, and I sat alone to a dinner, served me by Huey, in a depth of gloom and melancholy which he had never reached before, debating whether to write to Mauchline or to go down myself the following morning.

While turning the matter over in my mind, Mr. Francis Hastings's name was brought in to me, and the humor of the situation struck me with some force, for here was a girl partially engaged to two men, off visiting a third, with a fourth clamoring at the door to be her husband.

"Come in," I cried heartily to the large-faced young man when he appeared at the doorway. "I'm glad to see ye, Mr. Hastings. Will ye have a glass with me?" and I pushed the decanter toward him.

"You doubtless know my errand, Lord Stair," he said, refusing the brandy by a shake of the head. "You had my letter?"

"Some time since, but I put off answering it, thinking—" I hesitated; the truth being that the matter had passed clean from my mind after reading the epistle—"thinking a talk would be better."

"Have you any objections to me?" he asked, coming straight to the point.

I had a great many, but it was scarce possible to name them under the circumstances, and I shuffled a bit.

"To be frank," said I, "there are obstacles."

"What are they?" he asked, and the conceit in his tone conveyed the thought that for the honor of an alliance with him obstacles should be overcome.

"Well," said I, "there's Mr. Danvers Carmichael, who is perhaps the chief one; and his Grace of Borthwicke, another; and Duncan of Monteith, and McMurtree of Ainswere—and others whose names I could set before you."

"And does she love any of these?" he asked.

"She has not taken me into her confidence," I answered; "but my honest advice to you is to forget all about her."

"I think," he said, testily, "with your permission, I shall ask her myself."

"Yes, yes! Do!" And as I thought of all that would probably come to him for his audacity I urged it still further: "Do, by all means!" I cried.

He had scarce gone from the house, and I was still laughing a bit over the affair, when Huey, with a changed face and an excited voice, came back to me from the kitchen.

"There's a man, hard ridden, in the doorway with a letter which he will give to none but your lordship," said he, adding the thing which told the reason for his pale face and hurried voice: "He's from Mauchline."

A premonition of evil came over me, and as the fellow handed me the billet a sudden chill and shaking seized my body, so that I was forced to put the letter upon the table to keep the writing steady enough for me to see. It was from Janet McGillavorich, short to exasperation, and, with no set beginning, read as follows:

"Nancy is taken ill and lies delirious at the King's Arms in Mauchline. We have a doctor here, but I have become alarmed, for it is now the fourth day that she has been unconscious. I think it better to let you know just how matters stand, and to ask that ye come down yourself immediately upon receipt of this and bring Dr. McMurtrie with you.

"In haste,
"JANET MCGILLAVORICH."

If it be recalled that I had at this time no knowledge of the accident to Janet's old house, could surmise no reason for Nancy's lying at a public inn, and was in an agony of fear for her life, the wretched state of my mind can well be understood; but I was still capable of quick action, and within an hour Dr. McMurtrie, the end of his dinner carried in a bag, and myself were upon the Mauchline road.

The crawling of the coach through the darkness, the insane waits for horses, the many necessary but time-consuming details told upon my distraught mind to such an extent that when I descended at the door of the inn I felt an old and broken man. The memory of another ride which I had taken was heavy upon me, my teeth chattered, the horror showing in my face so plainly that Dame Dickenson read my thought on the instant, and coming forward, plucked me by the sleeve.

"She's better," she said, and at the sound of the words I put my head on the table and wept like a child.

Our presence being made known to Mrs. McGillavorich, she came down immediately, with a white face and tired, sleepless eyes.

"She's having the first sleep in three days," she said, "and the old doctor thinks the worst is by. But ye'd best not disturb her. Let her bide quiet now."

Dr. McMurtrie and I took turns by the bedside that day and night, but she knew neither of us, lying, in her waking moments, with scarlet cheeks and wide, delirious eyes, singing snatches of songs, weaving meaningless words together, and crying over and over again, "It's of no use—no use—no use," in a kind of eldritch sing-song which wrung my heart.

"She's had some kind of a shock," Dr. McMurtrie said, "one that she'll be some time getting over, I fear."

As to the cause of the trouble the whole house was as mystified as myself.

"I know as little of the reason of her illness as you do yourselves." Janet said, after she had narrated the doings at the inn. "On Tuesday, a little after noon, she came to me saying that she'd been in such an excited state, she was off alone to collect herself by a walk, and while she was out she passed a girl who was putting some linen on the bleach-green; Nancy spoke to her concerning some lace with which the garments were trimmed, and as they talked Rab Burns passed them, with four or five of his cronies, and the girl broke into a passion at sight of him, shaking her fist after him and calling him foul names as he went down the lane.

"At this, another girl, who was soon to be a mother, came weeping from the house, and Nancy emptied her purse to them before they parted.

"When she came in," Janet went on, "her face was white and set, her eyes seeing nothing, and when Rab Burns sent up his name to her that night she said to the maid, 'Tell Mr. Burns that Miss Stair will not see him!' and sat by the window, staring into the starlight, where I found her at five the next morning with the fever upon her and her wits gone gyte."

I have had much sorrow in my time, but the agony of suspense and suspicion with which the next few days were filled pales every grief of my life that went before this time. Was it possible, I asked God, that my wee bit, wonderful lassie, my Little Flower, had bloomed to be trodden under foot by a plowman of Ayr?

McMurtrie drove me from the house at times for rest of mind as well as exercise, and one night, at the week's end, having walked farther than usual, I entered an ale-house in the Cowgate for something to quench my thirst. There was a man standing by the window, and at sight of him, for it was Robert Burns, and the time was not yet come for me to say to him what might have to be said, I drew back, thinking myself unseen, and closed the door. I had gone but a few steps in the darkness when I felt a hand clapped on my shoulder, and turning, found Burns himself beside me.

"Come back," he cried, "come back; I want a word with ye, Lord Stair. You've come down," he cried, "to take your daughter from the company of those unfit for her to know. And you're right in it. But the thought that ye showed toward me when you went out to avoid my company is wrong; wrong, as I must face my Maker in the great last day! I've had my way with women; but in this one case I've taken such care of her as ye might hae done yourself!

"She's found the truth of me, and our friendship is by with forever! I know that well.

"But tell her from me, will ye not, that such righting of a wrong as can be done I am determined to do, and that the lassie she kens of is to be my wife as soon as she chooses. Tell her," and here the tears stood big in his eyes, "that I am sorrier than I can ever say that her mind has been assoiled by my wicked affairs—" and here he broke forth into a sudden heat—"God Almighty!" he cried, "if a woman like that had loved me, Shakespeare would have had to look to his laurels. Aye! and Fergusson, too. The Lord himself made me a poet, but she might have made me a man!" *

---

* Lord Stair mentions here that he afterward had from this same girl (Mrs. Nellie Brown), the following description of the poet's first meeting with the sister, Jean Armour:

"D'ye see Sam McClellan's spout over the gate there? Weel, it was just whaur Rab and Jean first foregathered. Her and me had gaen there for a gang o' water, an' I had fill't my cans first an' come ower here juist whaur you an' me's stan'in. When Jean was fillin' her stoups, Rab Burns cam' up an' began some nonsense or ither wi' her, an' they talked an' leuch sae lang that it juist made me mad; to think, tae, that she should ha'e a word to say wi' sic a lowse character as Rab Burns. When she at last cam' ower, I gied her a guid hecklin. 'Trowth,' said I, 'Jean, ye ocht to think black-burnin' shame o' yersel. Before bein' seen daffin' wi' Rab Burns, woman, I would far raither been seen speakin'—to a sodger.' That was the beginnin' o' the unfortunate acquaintance."

The marriage between the two was acknowledged to the world ir 1787 —EDITOR.

CHAPTER XIX

THE QUARREL BETWEEN DANVERS AND NANCY

We were back at Stair for nearly a fortnight, with Nancy quite herself again, before she took me into her confidence regarding the Burns experience. Leaning against the wall by the stair-foot with her hands behind her, a way she'd had ever since she was a wee bit, the talk began, with no leading up to it on either side.

"Jock," she said, suddenly, and a quaint look came over her face, "I've never told you what made me ill at Mauchline."

"I've been waiting," I answered.

"It was a bad time for me," she continued.

"I know that, Lady-bird," said I.

"Part of me died," she said, and on this a thought flashed by me which, I have often held, that in some way her language expressed more than she knew.

"I've been filled up with conceit of myself," she went on, "and I got punished for it."

"There was never a woman living with less!" I cried, so sodden in my affection for her that I could not stand to hear her blamed, even by herself.

"Maybe I didn't show it," she said with a smile, "but I've always held, 'in to mysel',' that the gifted folk were God's aristocrats, and the day I told Danvers Carmichael and you my esteem of lords and titles and forbears I said just what I thought, though both of you laughed at me, for I reasoned that any one whom the Almighty took such special pains with must have the grand character as well. And so I made of all the people who write and paint and sing a great assembly, like Arthur's knights, who were over the earth righting wrongs and helping the weak. Then came the Burns book; and there are no words to tell the glory of it to me. All the great thoughts I had dreamed were written there, and before the power of this man, who took the commonest things of life and wrote them out in letters of gold, I felt as one might before the gods. It was of Burns I thought in my waking hours, and 'twas of him I dreamed by night; and I thanked God to be born in his country and his time, so that I might see one, from the people, who had, in its highest essence, the thing we call genius.

"But always, always," she interrupted, smiling, "with the conceit of myself which I mentioned before. Because God had given me a little gift, I believed that I was in some degree a chosen creature, a bit like the Burns man himself.

"The first time I talked with him at the inn I felt his power, his charm; but there was something in his ways to which I had never been accustomed in men—a certain freedom, which I put by, however, as one of the peculiarities of his gift.

"Well," she said, coming over and burying her face in my breast, "it took me but two weeks to discover that the thing we call genius has no more to do with a person's character than the chair he sits in; that a man can write like a god and live like the beasts in the fields. Can speak of Christian charity like the disciples of old, and hold the next person who offends him up to the ridicule of the whole parish! That he can write lines surpassing—aye!" she cried, "*surpassing* Polonius's advice to his son, and leave them uncopied on an ale-house table to go off with the first loose woman who comes by, and be carried home, too drunk to walk, the next morning, roaring out hymns about eternal salvation.

"And after I met the Armour girl, and found the harm that Burns had brought to her, my idol fell from its clay feet, and I was alone in a strange country, with my gods gone, and my beliefs in shreds around me.

"But I have made my readjustments. I am humbled. I see how little value verse-making holds to the real task of living, and I am a better woman for what I have been through. I have learned—almost losing my mind over the lesson," she interjected, with her own bright smile—"the value of the solid virtues of life; and I've come to the conclusion that it is harder to be a gentleman than a genius. God makes one, but a man has the handling of the other upon himself. Danvers Carmichael," she continued, looking up at me, "is a gentleman. His word is his bond. He considers others, respects woman and honors her; controls his nature, and has a code of conduct which he would rather die than break. Ah!" she said, "I have had a bitter time; but it's taught me to appreciate that in the real things of life—the things for which we are here, love, home, and the rearing of children—genius has about as much part as the royal Bengal tiger. It's beautiful to look at, but dangerous to trifle with, and,"—here she smiled at her own earnestness for a second as she started up the stairs—" and here endeth the first lesson, my Lord of Stair!"

I was in no way sorry as to her conclusions about the value of verse-making, for I had seen that her continual mental excitement was sapping her vitality; and I closed my eyes to sleep that night with a feeling of gratitude to my Heavenly Father that the Burns business was by with forever.

Toward noon of the next day I discovered my mistake. Smoking by the fire in the chimney corner of the hall, I heard a clattering of horses' hoofs on the gravel outside, and from the window saw Danvers Carmichael throw the reins to his groom, run up the steps of the main entrance, and ask for Miss Stair in a voice strangely unlike his usual one. I knew that Nancy was sitting with some lace-work in her own writing-room, and hoped much from their meeting, and that her recent experience, which made her set a new value on Danvers, would bring about a more complete understanding between them.

"Ah, Dandy!" said Nancy, her voice having a ring of pleasure in it. "When did you return from Glasgow?"

"Late yesterday," he answered. "I dined at the club in town and rode home about ten. I'm thinking of leaving Arran for a time," he said, coldly.

"Why didn't you stop?" she asked, with some surprise.

"I was in no mood for visiting last night."

"You were ill, or worried?" Nancy inquired anxiously.

"Worried, ill," he answered. "Ill, and ashamed, and miserable, in a way, please God, most men may never know."

"What is it, Dandy?" and I saw that at his vehemence she put her work on the table and moved toward him.

"Oh!" he cried out, "it's you! It's you! In the month before I went away I had to endure God only knows what bitterness because of you! And on my return last night I hear at the club that ye've been off in Ayrshire visiting Robert Burns! Did ye have a pleasant time?" he asked, glowering down at her from his great height, handsome and angrier than I had ever seen him before.

The tone rather than the words struck fire immediately, and Nancy's eyes took a peculiar significance, boding little good to the one with whom she was having dealings.

"Very pleasant," she answered, in a voice of ice, picking up her work and reseating herself.

"Before I went away," Danvers continued, "there was little in the way of humiliation which I had not endured at your hands! I've seen ye play fast and loose with half the men in Edinbro'—aye, in the whole of Scotland, it seems to me! I have heard your name coupled more often than I can tell with that of the greatest scoundrel in Scotland, and have held silence concerning it; and when things came to that pass that none could endure it and I struck him; how was the affair settled. By your sending for him!—for him!" he fairly screamed, "while I, your betrothed husband almost, was left in ignorance that ye knew of the matter at all.

"And at the time of the meeting in the Holm, what does the damned scoundrel do but come forth with his friends and apologize for his conduct with seeming generosity, naming the whole business the result of a crusty temper of his own, apologizing handsomely, and in a devilish open way, ending by saying:

"'One who is dear to me has shown me my faults, and I am doing her bidding, as well as fulfilling my own sense of justice, in asking your pardon!' And at the mention of you he took off his hat and spoke as one who performs an obligation to another who has a right to demand it.

"You can perhaps see the light in which I was placed! Even my own friends went over to the duke's side, and I was forced to shake his damned hand and join him at the Red Cock for breakfast or show a surly front by my refusal. I was made a laughing stock for the whole party. Put in the wrong in every way; and even Billy Deuceace, a man of penetration, was so deceived by this, that afterward he bade me, with a laugh, 'fight about women who were in love with me and not with other men.'"

During this rehearsal of his wrongs Nancy sat quietly embroidering, not looking at the speaker nor seeming to note the voice at all.

"I said nothing of the affair to you," he continued; "I thought to let the thing go by, and went off to Glasgow, hoping to forget it before we met again. And what do I come back to? To learn that half the town has it that you've visited an inn in another county and spent your days, aye, and I suppose they say your nights, too, with Rab Burns, whom decent folk will not let their daughters know. At tales like this the affair takes on another complexion. I do not want a wife for myself, nor a mother for my children, whose name has been bandied about like that!"

He was so beside himself with rage and jealousy and the further present annoyance of Nancy's inattention, that he raised his voice at the end to a tone of harshness, such as none had ever used to Nancy Stair, and which she was the last woman to stand patient under. She did the thing by instinct which would enrage him most, putting a thread to her needle, squinting up one eye as she did so, in a composed and usual manner, and letting a silence fall before she said, in a level and unemotional voice:

"Sit down, Dandy, and stop shouting. There's no use getting the town-guard out because you chance not to want me any longer for a wife. You don't have to have me, you know!"

He seemed somewhat dashed by this, and there was a pause, during which he took a paper from his pocket and cast it on the table before her.

"No," he says, "and that's very true; but for your own sake as the Lord of Stair's daughter, I'd write no more verses like these. God!" he cried, "to think of that white-faced American having a thing like that from you!"

"What's the matter with the writing?" she said, looking down at it as though its literary merit were the thing he questioned. "Mr. Hastings," she explained, "had an old song called the Trail of the Gipsies, and he rather flouted me because I set such store by it, but had it lined and sent me with some flowers. On the minute of their coming, and with the thought of how little the Anglo-Saxon comprehends any race save his own, I wrote these lines. I see no harm in them!"

As Nancy read the poem* over she looked up with the same curious look.

"What's the matter with it?" she asked again.

"The matter with it?" he repeated after her. "It's a thing no lady should ever have thought, and no woman should ever have written."

"Ye think so?" she said, and there was an amused tolerance in her voice as of discussing a mature subject with a child, adding in a tone as remote as if speaking of the Tenant Act, "Your opinions are always interesting, Dand."

"Interesting to you they may or may not

---

* A thousand thanks for the verses,
And the thoughts that they bring from you,
But it's only a gipsy woman
Who can feel how the trail holds true.

You of the Pilgrim fathers,
With your face so proud and pale,
And the birth born pain of a fettered brain,
What can ye know of the trail?

By the lawless folk who bore me,
By their passion and pain, and loss,
By their swords which strove and their Lights o' Love,
I've a right to the gipsy cross.

. . . .

Poems by Nancy Stair. Edinburgh Edition, 1796.

be, but it's just come to this: A young woman who continues the relations you do with the greatest scoundrel on earth; who writes verses immoral in tone to one man and visits another for weeks in an ale-house—but," and here he broke off suddenly, "you may know no better with your rearing."

"Miss Erskine will perhaps have been telling you what it is customary for young ladies to do," Nancy suggested, in a dangerous, level voice.

"I do not need telling. It's a thing about which right-thinking people will agree without words," he answered; and it was here that Nancy spoke in her own voice, though heated by anger, and with the words coming faster than ordinary.

"And that's maybe true," she said; "but there are other things to be considered. It has always been in my mind that most marriages are very badly made up," she said. "That in this greatest of all affairs between a man and a woman people lose their wits and trust to a blind kind of attraction for each other. I have thought to use my head a bit more in the matter. The very fact that you are misunderstanding me now as you do goes far to prove how foolish a marriage between us would have been."

"Heavens!" he cried, "you talk of marriage as though it were a contract between two shop-keepers to be argle-bargled over. It's an affair of the heart, not of the head. Ye've never loved me," he said bitterly, "or ye'd know that."

"That may be true," Nancy answered, mutinously. "I have tried to be fair to you, however, and not to let you have a wife who didn't know her own mind. I am, as you reminded me, different from other women in many ways. I like many——"

"I've noted that," he interrupted with scant courtesy.

"And I'm afraid I shall continue to like them for one thing or another till the end; and you're of a jealous turn, Danvers," she said, coldly.

"I have been," he said. "Where you were concerned I haven't a generous thought. I take shares in my wife with no man. I have been jealous of the sound of your voice, the glance of your eye. What I have had to endure because of this ye must surely have seen! When a woman loves a man she has no thought for another——"

"It's maybe so," Nancy broke in, "but it's as entirely beyond me as flying. If I loved you with all there is of me, and another came by with a bit of a rhyme, or a new tale, or a plan quite of his own thinking, the chances are many that you'd be clear out of my mind while he stayed."

"'Tis fortunate, as you say," he interrupted, "that we discover this before 'tis too late. I think it's a peculiarity that will go far to making the husband you take for yourself a very unhappy man."

"He will perhaps understand me better than you do," Nancy answered gently.

"Oh," he cried at this, "can't you see that a woman surrenders herself when she loves? She gives as gladly as a man takes, and is happy to have him for her lord and master. Not that he wishes to rule her, for 'twould be the thought of his life that her every desire should be filled, but she must be willing to yield."

"Ye'd have made a grand Turk," Nancy broke in, and there was a glint of humor in her tone as she spoke the words.

"I think," Danvers answered, "you'll find me asking only what most men expect to get."

"If that be true, the chances are heavy that I shall live and die unwed," she said with a laugh.

"Oh, no!" he cried, in a cutting voice. "I dare say your mind's made up as to what you intend to do! Perhaps when you're the Duchess of Borthwicke his grace will enjoy your visiting other men and writing lines like these," and he dashed his fist on the paper again.

Nancy had by this time come to the far end of her patience, and she was on her feet in a minute.

"Listen to me," she said. "I went to Ayrshire at the written asking of Janet McGillavorich to come to her own home. The morning I started for Mauchline the rear of her house fell into the cellar, making it extremely dangerous to remain in any part of the dwelling. I went to the inn only because she was there, and she stayed with me until my father came and took me away. I saw Robert Burns alone but once, entirely by accident, in the broad light of day.

"As for the rhyme," and she looked down at the paper for a moment, regarding it as a thing of no importance whatever, "it was not I who spoke in the lines, but a gipsy girl of my imaginings. Ye've had little personal experience with the thing called gift——"

He must have thought there was some flouting of him in this, for he broke in heatedly:

"And I thank God for it," he cried, "for it seems to be a thing which makes people betray trusts, lose all thought for others, raise hopes which they never intend to fulfil, unbridle their passions, forget their sex, and ride away to the deil at their own gate."

None could have foreseen the effect this speech had upon Nancy; the thought it contained falling so parallel to her own talk of the night before; but it's one matter to say a thing of one's self and an entirely different affair to have it said concerning one, and in a minute her anger fairly matched his own.

"Ye've insulted me, Danvers," she said, "many times in this talk, both in word and look; insulted me in my father's house, where you've been welcome, boy and man, ever since ye were born; insulted me, too, in a way I'm not like to forget."

She stood very tall and straight, her cheeks aflame, the lace on her bosom trembling with the quickness of her breathing, and her work dropped on the table before her as she slipped from her finger the ruby ring and pushed it toward him.

"Go away or stay at Arran, as you please! Ride or tie as best suits your mind, for in the way of love everything is gone between us for all time. And where ye go," she went on, "ye who pride yereself so on your birth and breeding, just recall the fact that of all the men of gift whom I have known, and they have been many, not one has ever forgotten himself before me as you have done to-day, nor insulted the daughter of a friend in her own house!"

He made no move to take the ring, and it lay twinkling on the table between them as Nancy turned to leave the room.

"Good-by," he said, turning white, and then (and I thought a heart of stone might be touched by the compliment under such circumstances) "Oh," he cried, as though the words were forced from him, "you are so beautiful!"

"The country's full of pretty women, any one of whom will be likely to marry you, when you order her to!" Nancy returned with an exasperating smile.

"I'll try it and see. I think I will not go away from Arran. I may do something that will surprise you," he added.

"There's nothing ye could do that would surprise me, unless it were something sensible, and ye're not like to do that," she retorted, and without another word she left him standing alone, and he flung himself out of the house, disappearing across the lawn, in the direction of Arran, with a white face and a brooding devil in his eyes that showed his mind obstinate and unrelenting, and in a mood to do any foolish thing that came by.

CHAPTER XX

DANVERS GIVES US A GREAT SURPRISE

A FORTNIGHT passed with no news of the Arran folks whatever, when one morning Sandy appeared at the door of the small dining-room where we were breakfasting, his sudden appearance recalling that memorable day when he asked me on the cruise which brought my girl to me. In the first glance I had of him I saw trouble; twice before he had worn such a look, once at his mother's death, and again when his wife had left him, taking the boy to London, and he knew the separation to be final. His face was very pale, the pallor showing strangely through his tanned skin, and his mouth was set, and twitching at the corners as beyond his control.

"Are ye ill, Sandy?" I cried, going toward him hurriedly.

"No," he answered, sitting down at the table and hiding his face in his hands; "but

I've had a blow! I've had a blow!" he repeated. "It's Danvers," he went on, when he could speak. "He went off to Lanure yesterday and married Isabel Erskine!"

"Married Isabel Erskine!" I cried, like a parrot.

"Married Isabel Erskine!" repeated Nancy, who stood staring at him as if she doubted his saneness.

"Married Isa—" I was beginning again, in a highly intelligent manner, when Huey MacGrath suddenly dropped the tray of dishes he was bringing in and carried his hands to his face, beginning to moan and cry like a woman, for it had been the wish of his heart to have these two children, who in some way he believed to be his own, married to each other.

The disturbance was a good thing for all, for it broke the unnatural tension between us, and after MacColl had assisted Huey into the pantry, where I could see him standing, listening at the doorway, Sandy continued:

"It was all that talking, grape-eyed woman! It was for that she fetched her daughter to Arran. It's been going on right under my eyes, and I too blind and taken up with my own affairs to see it. The poor laddie," he cried. "The poor fool laddie!"

Understanding that a discussion of the marriage in her presence was an impossibility, Nancy left us, with a white face, on some pretense of business at the Burnside, and Sandy and I talked it out between us. Midnight found us going back and forth over the matter and arriving at the same point, that the chances of happiness for a man wedded to one woman and in love with another are just nothing at all. I could feel that there was one question in Sandy's mind which he could scarce bring himself to ask, and I took the suggestion of it upon myself.

"It will bring many changes to us," I said, "and to none more than Nancy."

"Do you think she cares for him?" Sandy asked, putting his thought plainly.

"To be frank with ye, Sandy," said I, "it's a matter I've been far from deciding. I believe that the visit to Mauchline changed her more than any other event in her life. Before it she'd idealized gift and the possession of it. When she came back she was changed in a way. 'It's a great thing to be a gentleman; I think it's more in the end than being a genius, Jock,' she said, and by this, as well as other speeches of hers, I am convinced that her mind had turned toward Danvers, and if he had come to her with any kindness at all, things would have been settled between them; but he burst in storming, poor fellow, like a crazy loon, and a fine quarrel they had of it, with this marriage as a resulting."

"There's one small good comes out of it all, which is that the paste-covered woman gets out of Arran to-day," Sandy ended. "It's a thing she had not counted upon, but Danvers wrote that they were off to the Continent, and it's not respectable for her to stay alone with me, and she packs for Carlisle to-morrow."

Of the next five months there is little to tell which bears directly upon my tale, except to make some mention of the "intellectual reform" of the Duke of Borthwicke, a name he put himself upon his altered conduct. News we had of him in plenty, and if rumor could be relied upon, he was a changed man. The first note of his new behavior was struck by his relieving the poor tenant-bodies on his Killanarchie estates from their rentals for three years because of the losses from a cattle blight. And before the sound of this had died away another bit was added to the tune of his reformation by his coming out strong against the crown for the repeal of the tax on Scotch whisky. And the full song of his praises began to be sung in public when he, being one of the Scotch Sixteen in the English House of Peers, declared for the inadequacy of representation which Scotland had in the House of Commons, and moved for an election of fifty-four, after the English manner.*

His letters to Nancy and myself at this time were of a piece with him, for he spoke with quaint sarcasm of that which he termed his "change of heart," and of the curious pleasure he obtained from marking his life out along another line. He wrote with detail as well of a new Paisley industry which he had started on one of his estates, asking Nancy's advice concerning a teacher for the lace-work, it being his purpose to have the young women round Borthwicke Castle turned toward making a livelihood after this manner. During all of this time his letters came frequently, and Nancy read them with much pleasure and many comments, but her private feelings toward the writer of them she confided to none.

---

* Scotland had but 16 Peers and 48 Representatives in Parliament at this time.

There was a talk which set Nancy's state of mind with some clearness, however, which fell between us directly after the offer of marriage made to her by McMurtrie of Ainswere.

"Dearest," she said, "I am beginning to see with my mind that every woman flies in the face of the Almighty not to take into her life's reckoning the instinct of her sex for love and motherhood. It seems to me that a great love must be the best thing of all; but I'm just here, I don't dare to marry because I'm afraid of myself; and I don't dare to stay unmarried for fear of that great and unrelenting thing called Nature."

"Nancy," said I, with an earnestness that came straight from the heart, "if ye feel like that, your hour has not yet struck. For when the great love comes, it's not a question of what you want, but what ye can't help; and I wouldn't think anything more about it, for ye'll know when it comes, my dear," I cried; "ye'll know when it comes!"

There was an odd scrap of business, trifling in itself, and yet leading to great trouble, which fell about this time, and I set it down as of interest to those who note the way fate uses all as instruments.

Nancy, Sandy, and I had planned a jaunt to Ireland. There had been no intention whatever of taking Huey with us, for he was the last person on earth to take upon a pleasure outing, as he regarded all strangers as rogues and villains, and the Irish people as heathen papists, worshiping idols in the few moments unoccupied in breaking each other's heads with shillalahs. He had for me and mine a devotion at once touching and uncomfortable; but as he grew older he interfered in all manner of matters beyond his province, offered advices absurd and impertinent, and never once in the whole sixty years of our acquaintance can I recall his agreeing entirely with a statement made by any body except Nancy. If he couldn't contradict one flatly, and the uncongenial part of acquiescence was forced upon him by his love of truth, he held a grudging silence or affected an absent mind, or no interest in the matter whatever.

As the years went by and his health became feebler he followed me about until he was like to drive me to Bedlam, and I used to discharge him from my service about once a fortnight. I had never realized how highly absurd our relations were until Nancy drew them to my attention.

"Ye can't go to Alton on Thursday, Jock," she said.

"Why?" I inquired.

"'Tis your day for discharging Huey," she answered with a laugh, making up a funny face at me.

I would not set any one to thinking that I had a lack of affection for my old serving-man, for I had seen his old age provided against in a manner to prove my care; but I knew that he loved me in spite of my conduct rather than because of it, and with no hope whatever of my eternal salvation.

The plans for our Irish trip were being discussed one day when Nancy found him weeping bitterly over the silver he was counting, when he told her that his grief came from fear lest we should get murdered or kidnapped in that strange country without him to look after us, and that the whole matter was taking he very life out of him.

The little one's heart was so touched by his sorrow and his age that she came back to Sandy and me with tears in her eyes, saying that if Huey couldn't go she would stay at home herself.

As he was too old and broken to travel with safety to himself, and as Nancy remained fixed as death, the Irish trip was not taken; by which, but for the whim of this old serving-man, we might have been from Scotland and avoided the bitter trouble which began at the Allisons' rout given in honor of the home-coming of Danvers and his bride.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ALLISONS' BALL AND THAT WHICH FOLLOWED IT

As I have written, save for Huey MacGrath, we should have been away from Scotland at the time of the Allisons' ball, and by this absence should have missed the visit of the Duke of Borthwicke concerning the Light-House Commission, which fell at the same time.

His grace's letter to Nancy just previous to this return was filled with a droll cataloguing of all the good deeds which he was doing, i the manner of an exact invoice.

"I hope you will not be forgetting any of these, not even the smallest," he concluded this epistle, "for it is because of these I am going to ask you a favor, a great favor—the greatest favor on earth."

For the two or three days before this merry-making Nancy was in a strange mood, of which

I could make nothing, her gaiety being more pronouncedly gay, and her silences continuing longer than I had ever noted them. She spent much of her time in her own room, trying on and having refitted a wonderful gown which Lunardi had sent up from London by special carrier the week before. I knew women well enough to understand that she wished to outshine even herself in this first meeting with Danvers since his marriage, perhaps to show him that she wore no willows on his account, or perchance to make him a bit regretful of what he had missed.

On the evening of the rout the duke dined at Stair, purposing to go with us to the ball and to be set down at his tavern on our way home. Nancy, in a short-waisted black frock, sat with us at the meal, merry as a child, chattering of the coming party and her "braw new claes," as she called them, as if there were no trouble in the world, or as if she were exempted from it, if it existed. She spent an hour or more upon her dressing, returning to us a lovelier, fairer, more radiant Nancy than she had ever seemed before, even to my infatuated fatherly eyes. Nor was this thought mine alone, for I saw the start of surprise which Montrose gave at sight of her, and heard the sudden breath he drew as she came toward us from the hall.

Her skin, always noticeably white and transparent, seemed this night to have a certain luminous quality. Her cheeks were flushed, her gray eyes shone mistily under the black lashes and blacker brows, and the scarlet outline of her lips was marked as in a drawing. She wore a gown of palest rose, covered with yellow cobwebby lace, which was her grandmother's, the satin of the gown showing through the film which covered it like "morning light through mist," as I told her, to be poetical. The frock was low and sleeveless, the bodice of it ablaze with gems, and there was another thing I noticed with surprise and admiration. She wore her hair high, though loose and soft about the brows, and in the coil of it a large comb set with many precious stones. This jewel, originally designed to wear at the back of the head, she had turned forward, making a coronet over her brows, beautiful in itself, becoming in the extreme, and I noted that his Grace of Borthwicke let his eyes rest upon it with a peculiar pleasure.

He rose at her entrance and bowed very low, with pretended servility, resuming his usual manner before he said, with significance:

"The coronet becomes you, Nancy Stair."

And she looked back at him, with a low laugh, with no self-consciousness in it, however, as she answered:

"There is none more competent to judge of that than yourself, your grace."

We arrived late at the ball, to find the rooms already crowded, and the Arran party, with Sir Patrick Sullivan, gathered in a group by the large window of the music-room.

Jane Gordon held me in talk a minute as I passed her, and for this reason his grace offered his arm to Nancy, and as the two of them passed together a hush fell on the people at the sight of them, and I could see by significant glances and the jogging of elbows that Edinburgh folks would take the news of a betrothal between them with small surprise. Gordon told me later that some one suggested this in a veiled fashion to his Grace of Borthwicke, who might easily have turned the matter aside or noted it not at all, but that he laughed openly, saying:

"If it had lain with me, my engagement to

Mistress Stair would have been announced the evening I saw her first. 'Tis the lady herself who refuses me," an attitude which, from one of his rank, was surely gentlemanly in the extreme.

As soon as I was disengaged from the Gordons I made my way toward the Carmichael family with joy in my heart to see my lad once more. He greeted me with affection, folding my hand in his as a loving son might do, rallying me on my good looks, patting me on the shoulder, and showing by every sign an honest fondness for me which touched me deeply. I could have wished that he looked better himself. He had lost no flesh; he carried himself with a jauntiness and elasticity which comes from strength, but the expression of his mouth was changed and his eyes had a restless, uninterested expression which showed him unsettled and unhappy.

Isabel looked ill at ease. She had lost her color, had taken on much flesh, and it seemed, as I observed her more, that it was from the father rather than the son that she obtained what comfort she had, for it was to Sandy she turned in all of the talk, and it was his arm upon which she leaned. Her manner to me was constrained, but not lacking in cordiality, and when I proposed that they should join our party she assented willingly enough. Because of this suggestion it fell that we met Nancy walking toward us on the duke's arm, and at the sudden sight of her Danvers Carmichael turned white and set his jaw as one who endures a physical hurt in silence.

And the rest of the evening was of a piece with life, wherein none can tell what latent qualities of our neighbor may be brought suddenly to the fore, upsetting every plan which we have made for years.

Whether Danvers lost every thought of behavior through his present unhappiness, or for the first time recognized what he had missed; whether the presence of his Grace of Borthwicke in such devoted attendance upon Nancy roused his jealousy, none could know, but he seemed to throw obligations to the wind, and bore himself as one who has a mind to drink his fill of present pleasure, no matter how extortionate the reckoning may be.

So it fell that from the first word spoken between Nancy and Danvers it was he who, by sheer recklessness, took the upper hand with her, the duke being pushed back, as it were, upon Sir Patrick or myself for company.

"I did not think to forget any of your loveliness, Miss Stair," Danvers said as Nancy's hand met his, "but I find I had; or mayhap you've added to it during my absence. A thing which I had held to be impossible."

"'Tis in France we learn such speeches," Nancy answered, lifting her brows.

"Wherever you are such speeches would be the natural talk," Danvers replied, and though he used a jesting tone in the words, his passion for her was so inflamed that the impression of the words was of great earnestness, and we—at least I speak for myself—were given a feeling of looking at love-making not intended for our eyes.

The entire evening was a most uncomfortable time, filled for me with fear of coming trouble as I noted Sandy's knit brows and his efforts to keep Isabel from the dancing-room where Nancy and Danvers were walking together through one quadrille after another, until the gossip of the town was like to take hold of the matter. It was a curious thing that in my anxiety I should turn for help against Danvers to the duke himself.

"Your grace," I said, trying to keep the tone a merry one, "you are neglecting the lady you escorted here to-night, are you not?" and he laughed in a dry way before he answered:

"In faith I think that it is the lady who is neglecting me. I'll stop it," he added. There was no "perhaps" or "if possible" in his tone.

"It would be best, I think, for all concerned," I answered at a sight of Isabel's pale face and Sandy's anxious eyes.

Upon the instant Montrose started toward the place where Nancy stood, a little apart from a group of gay people, so that her talk with Danvers could be in the nature of a private one, if desired. As the duke made his way toward her I followed a little in the rear. He was, as always, smiling, calm, master of himself and of others, and as he came toward her he asked, in a low tone of penetrating quality, which by intention conveyed both affection and the rights of ownership:

"You are not tiring yourself?" and turning to Danvers, he added, "You must help

Lord Stair and myself to take care of her, Mr. Carmichael. She has not been well of late."

I can set the words out, but the solicitation, such as a lover, nay, a husband might have shown, are impossible to convey with any nicety; and at his coming, Nancy, who had had one experience of the clash of tempers between these two men, temporized the affair by saying:

"My father and his grace are surely right. I have not been well of late, and find it indeed time for me to say 'Good night.'"

Toward morning I was awakened by the noise of a loosened blind, and slipping into a dressing-gown went through the passage to fasten the latch. Passing Nancy's room I heard a moan, and, startled out of myself, listened to hear another, and still another, as though a heart were breaking. There was a light in the room, and through a small window in the door, the curtain of which was drawn a bit aside, I saw the little one whom I would gladly die to save from any pain, lying face down upon the floor, her arms stretched out, the hands clutched tightly together, and her whole body shaking as in mortal illness.

"Nancy, Nancy, let me in! Open the door to me," I cried.

She started to a sitting position, tried to arrange her disordered hair and gown, and I saw her cast a look in the mirror as she came toward the door, to see how far she could make me believe that nothing unusual was the matter with her.

"What is it?" I asked, my heart bursting with love and sympathy as I drew her to my breast.

She turned her eyes toward me, eyes which held the despair in them which only women know.

"Oh," she cried, clutching me to keep from falling, "didn't you see?"

"I saw nothing," I answered.

"I can't speak it," she says; "but another of life's lessons has come to me to-night. Do you remember the time I told you that I had learned something with my head? I learned it with my heart to-night, and it's like to kill me. Oh, what have I done?" she cried, "what have I ever done to deserve such punishment as this?"

"Tell me, Nancy," I said. "There is nothing in God's world that can't be helped by sympathy."

"I can't tell you. I can't put words to it. See!" she said, standing a bit apart from me. "Look at me! Do you know a girl more to be envied? Handsomer? Richer? More gifted? Think, too, of the advantages that I've had with Father Michel and Hugh Pitcairn to teach me! Think of the stir my songs have made! And at the end what am I?

"Ah!" she went on, "take any woman, *any* woman, educate her in the highest knowledges known, keep her with men, and far from her own sex, and at the end of it, what is she? A creature who wants the man she loves and babies of her own," and at these last words she broke into another storm of weeping which drove me wild with dread.

"Nancy," I cried, "think of your recent illness. For my sake try to control yourself more. There is the poor head to be thought of always."

"It's been this head of mine that's been my undoing, Jock," she answered, between her sobs. "All the trouble has come from that."

MacColl was off for Dr. McMurtrie before daybreak, and I sat holding Nancy's hand waiting for his coming, with Pitcairn's ancient statement going round and round clatter-mill in my brain:

"Ye can't educate a woman as ye can a man. With six thousand years of heredity, the physiology of the female sex, and the Lord himself against you, I'm thinking it wise for you to have your daughter reared like other women, to fulfil woman's great end," and pondering over the fact that the great lawyer and Nancy herself seemed to have come to exactly the same conclusion.

I was alarmed by her pallor and exhaustion, but McMurtrie assured me that a sleeping potion would set her far along the road to recovery; and at breakfast, after Nancy had fallen into an induced sleep, unknown to himself he gave me what I felt to be the key to the whole bitter suffering she was enduring, suffering, I feared, which came from a love learned too late.

"Your friend Sandy will be a grandfather soon, I see," said the old doctor, beaming at me over his glasses as he drank his tea.

This was the beginning of a troubled time for all of us, and one which a partial biographer of Danvers Carmichael would like to slur over or leave untold entirely, for it seemed that neither reason nor self-respect could do anything with him in his thirst for Nancy's society. As soon as she was about again he was over at Stair, the excuse being some presents which he had brought us from the strange lands he had been visiting; his constant thought of her, even upon his bridal tour, being plainly shown by these: a ring from Venice, of wrought gold with aquamarines, some Spanish embroideries, quaint carvings; and finally he put the cap upon his extravagance by producing from an inner pocket a girdle of Egyptian workmanship, too valuable by far for her to accept from him.

"Surely, Dandy," I broke in at this, "ye must see that Nancy, no matter what the old-time affection between us may be, can not take such gifts from you?"

"Why not?" he answered, looking straight at me.

"It might be misinterpreted," I began, lamely.

"By whom?" he inquired.

"Not by us," I replied, "but by others."

"And what others are to know?" he demanded. "I am not going to make the matter of a gift public business."

There was something in me which made it impossible to mention his wife to him, but Nancy said, with gentleness and great wisdom, as it seemed to me:

"They are beautiful, and I would love to have them from you, Danvers; and some time, when Isabel and I become great friends, I'll ask them of you, maybe; but I can not take them now."

The next morning brought him back, with some strange translations and stranger foreign prints, where he knew my weakness; and I sat with the two of them, laughing and criticising the pictures or the writings until the luncheon time came, when it was impossible to turn a friend out of one's house, and I urged him myself to stay with us, by which it was near three when he set back to Arran Towers.

On the following morning he came again, with a flimsy excuse concerning a mare he was thinking of purchasing; and so, by this and by that, he managed to spend most of his time at Stair, and in Nancy's society, seemingly unconscious of a wife he left at Arran for Sandy to console.

I grew so anxious that I lost sleep, my appetite went from me; I would waken in the morning with a load on my breast as of guilt, and the thought before me of having a situation to handle which by a mistake of mine might be turned to a tragedy.

Walking from the burn with Father Michel one day we saw Danvers Carmichael striding through the Holm gate toward Stair House, and the glance that passed between us told me without words that the holy father's thought was mine, which was that two people near Edinbro' Town were playing very close to the fire.

"I've had some thought to speak to him of his conduct," Father Michel said, "but it would have more effect coming from you, my lord."

As I entered the house, with a purpose half formed, I found Danvers in the hall talking to Dickenson, by whom Nancy had sent word that one of her headaches was upon her, and that she was, by reason of it, unable to see any one.

The concern in Danvers's manner, the unconscious exhibition of tenderness in his voice, stiffened my half-formed resolution, and I did just what the impulse bade me.

"Step into the library here, Danvers," said I. "I want a word with ye."

He gave me a questioning look, following me with no words and stood waiting for me to speak after I had cautiously closed the door.

"It's just come to this, Dandie," I said, "you must stop coming to this house as ye do! Until ye had a wife there was never one who entered the door more welcome, but as long as I have Nancy Stair to think about, ye'll just have to end these visits entirely. With the matter of an old love between you, an affair known to the whole town as well, your conduct is fair impossible, and, what is more, misunderstood!"

And here again a difficult thing in him to handle appeared; never in his life had he known fear and a lie was a stranger to his lips, for his birth, gear, and rearing had given him a secured position in which he did as he chose, with excuses to none, and a be-damned-to-you attitude to all who found fault with him, and it was with the candor and shamelessness resulting from these that my dealings lay.

"Misunderstood—how?" he repeated after me like an echo.

"Well," said I, "the gossips will be having it that ye're in love with my daughter still."

"Lord Stair," says he, "whether the gossips speak it or not is of little moment to me, but it's the truth before God! There was never another woman in the world like her, and from the moment I set eyes upon her I've loved her and wanted her for my wife. I love her more now since I have known what I missed; what I missed!" he repeated, his face working in a kind of agony and his eyes swimming with tears. "Oh," he continued, "what a wreck I have made of my life!"

"There's no need, by the same token," I cried, "to make a wreck of another's as well. Ye've a wife at home, a wife who loves you and whom you swore to love and honor. I have my daughter's reputation to think of, and the end of the whole matter is you'll just have to make your visits less frequent."

He had never come to me for sympathy before when he had not found it, and the sorrow in his face melted me more than was wise.

"Say once a fortnight, or such like," I said weakly. "Considering the relations between your father and me, visits so spaced might pass unnoticed. But I tell you honestly, Danvers Carmichael, when a man loves a woman whom he can't have, there is nothing for it but a good run and a far one. You'd better stay away altogether, laddie. It's the wisest course."

He left me with no further word, and I hoped that he had come to my way of thinking, when Satan himself took a hand in the affairs between Nancy and himself.

CHAPTER XXII

A STRANGE MEETING

Upon the day following that on which I denied Danvers the house, a letter came to us from a hamlet on the west coast, near Allenlough, saying that Janet McGillavorich was sick unto death and desired that Nancy should come to her immediately.

It was a tedious journey, and while I sorrowed for the cause of it, I was glad to have her away from Stair for a while, and hastened her departure with Dickenson on the afternoon coach of the same day upon which the letter arrived. Even with this speed it was far into the second day before she came to the house in which Janet was lying; a house which seemed to have straggled back from the sea and stood lonesomely by itself in a small fenced garden having a gate-and-chain opening to the graveled path. It was a double-storied dwelling of pink brick, with small-paned windows and ivy creeping over it everywhere, even upon the wooden cap of the doorway, which hung over the two broad stone steps of the entrance.

There was no time to knock before the door was opened to Nancy by the old woman who had been for many years Janet's maid, companion, and housekeeper, whose eyes were red with weeping and whose whole bearing denoted the greatest anxiety.

"She's took worse," she said. "It's thought she will not last the night."

"Will she know me?" Nancy asked.

"Oh, aye! She's her wits about her still. She knew Mr. Danvers," the old wife replied.

"Mr. Danvers," Nancy repeated after her. "Is Mr. Danvers here?" And at the words Danvers himself came forward to greet her.

"Are you cold?" he inquired, in the whispering tone used when sickness is near. "This has been a dreadful trip for you to take. You must have some hot tea at once." And, as the old woman bustled away to prepare it:

"Were you sent for, Danvers?" asked Nancy.

He nodded acquiescence, answering:

"The two of us are named in the will," the tears coming to his eyes as he spoke of Janet's kindness.

Tea had scarce been brewed when the old doctor came from above to say that Mrs. McGillavorich had heard of Nancy's arrival and wanted to see her immediately, adding, with some philosophy:

"It excites her so not to get her own way, that it couldn't excite her more to have it; so just go up, my dear, go right up!"

In this way, at the time of their lives when each was least prepared for trial and bitterly unhappy, it fell that Danvers and Nancy were thrown together in an intimacy impossible under other circumstances; relieving each other in the watching, sitting together by the bedside through the long hours of the night, or walking back and forth in each other's company to the little village on needful errands for the small household. In the tiny dining-room Nancy served at one side of the table while Danvers carved at the other, the suggestiveness of such an arrangement sending disordered longings to the hearts of both.

One dreadful night when Janet, who was barely conscious, clung to Nancy's hand, although the girl's head ached miserably and she had had no sleep for forty-eight hours, she showed by a sign to Danvers her intention to remain by the bedside in the great arm-chair. Her weariness and suffering made his heart yearn over her, and he leaned forward from the place he sat to put his hand upon her aching brow. His soothing touch, or perhaps a cause more subtle still, comforted her, and she fell asleep, to find the gray light of morn and Danvers, motionless beside her, having sat all those weary hours with his arm in a position which it must have tortured him to maintain. On the instant of her awakening she said, in a whisper:

"Your poor arm, Danvers! Your poor arm!"

And the strain of his mind showed in the answer:

"I would lose an arm altogether for what I have had to-night."

At the end of the fifth day Janet was so far recovered that she was able to sit up for a while against the pillows, and from this on her convalescence was a rapid one, although the tenth day had gone by when she told Danvers, with her customary frankness, to be off about his business. The evening before his departure, Nancy and he sat in Janet's room, fearful of being alone together for even a minute, and past eleven they parted for the night, in the old lady's presence, speaking their farewells in gay voices, with many assurances of meeting again in Edinburgh at some near time.

"I went to my room, Jock," Nancy said, when she told me this tale, "locked and bolted the door, and built a great fire in the chimney, for I was shivering from head to foot. And I thought of you! Only of you! Your love for me! The touch of your kind hands! Your dear gray head!—and before every other thing in life was the thought to do nothing to shame you, nor to cause a pain to that true heart of yours. And then I got down on my knees at the bedside like a little child and prayed to God.

"'O God,' I cried, 'take this pain from my heart, for I can no longer endure it. It's killing me. It's killing me, here, all alone! away from Jock Stair! And if You will do this thing I will never ask another of You in all my days!' Trying to make a compact with my Maker," she finished, "like a foolish child——"

She heard the clock strike four, and knowing the hour near when he must leave, crept to the window to see if enough light had come for her to have a sight of him as he went down the path. While she stood peering out into the darkness, she heard a rap at the bedroom door.

"Who is it?" she cried.

"It's I—Danvers Carmichael!" came a voice, low but very distinct; at sound of which she unbarred the door and slipped into the hallway.

He had made himself ready for his departure; his great coat, with the cape drawn up, already on, his cap upon his head, and a lighted lantern beside him, casting an eerie gleam along the black passage. He was white to the lips, his eyes sunken and reckless, and at sight of him Nancy cried in alarm:

"What is it, Danvers? What is it?"

"Oh, my girl!" said he. "It's just this! I can't go away and leave you here! I can never go and leave you any more! The thought of it chokes me! I love you, love you, love you!" he went on, "with all there is of me. Last year I offered you love and honor. This year it's love and dishonor, maybe, but love still, love that is greater than shame or death.

Will ye come away with me? There are other lands than ours and other laws. Bigbie's lugger is lying at the foot of the hill with sail up for Glasgow, and from there the world lies open for us.

"Oh, best beloved," he went on, "think of it! Does it mean anything to you?—to be alone together, forever more? Do you know what it is to waken with outstretched arms, longing for another, to——"

"I have suffered, Danvers," Nancy interrupted him. "I made mistakes, bitter mistakes, my head being so engaged with other matters that I lost the chart of woman's nature. And when I saw—" she paused at this, for it was something she could not bring herself to speak out; but words were unneeded between them, for his eyes sought hers hungrily, and they stood at gaze with each other for a space before Danvers cried:

"And to think it's not you—to think it's not you!" he repeated, with a moan like an animal in pain. "God!" he went on in his raving, "I can not and will not stand it longer! Why is a love like this given to a man? Do we choose? Have I had any choice in the matter? Whoever it was who designed the peculiar hell of my own nature can take the consequences of it. Speak to me, Nancy!" he cried; "speak to me! Do not stand there looking at me like a statue! For God's sake, speak—for it seems as though I should kill you and myself, and so make an end."

His grief had so worked upon him by this time that Nancy was beside herself with fear for him, although she spoke quietly and in as natural a voice as she could summon.

"I'll go with you, Dandie," she said; "I'll go with you. Wait for me," reentering her room; "just wait for me!"

It took her but a moment to get some stout walking-boots, a dark skirt, and the scarlet Connemara cloak which she had worn on many of their walks together, and pulling the hood of it over her head, she stepped softly back into the hallway.

"I am ready," she said, slipping her hand into his; "I am ready. Let us go."

There was no further word spoken between them. In silence they walked, hand in hand, along the frozen passage and down the twisting stairs, closing the house door noiselessly behind them. Outside it was very dark, save in the far east, where there was a rim of white showing in the sky like a line on a slate. The cold was biting, and a wind which had not reached the ground blew through the tree-tops with a rushing sound and sent a scurry of leaves before them on their path. Danvers had prepared himself by a lantern, and there seemed something significant of the business in hand in his determination to leave it behind; it was in the blackness of midnight, with a silent country stretching away from them in every direction and the stillness of the dead, that the two walked the narrow path and turned into the lane which led by a cut over the rise toward the Dumfries road. At the coming out of the close-way a chill wind struck them, and Nancy, taken suddenly from the warmth of bed, drew back and shivered, at which Danvers put his arm around her, throwing part of his cape over her. Still in silence, they walked until they came to the brow of the hill, at which place the path divides, one part of it winding across the bridge to the stage road, and the other dropping down by a clump of sailors' homes, west, to the sea. Enough light had come by this time to see the boats lying at anchor in the cove and to distinguish Bigbie's lugger from the rest, as she bobbed up and down, her sails spread and ready to be off. At the sight of this boat Danvers turned suddenly, as if recalled to his senses, and faced Nancy, as they stood at the parting of the ways.

"God forgive me!" he cried. "Oh, God forgive me, but I can't do it! I can't take ye. Not though you begged me on your knees; not though I knew you'd die without me. Oh, can you ever forgive the words I've said to you this morning? Will ye think rather that I'd choose to see ye dead than gone with me in the way I've asked? That I'd rather die myself than take ye; and that I love you, love you enough to give you up! And it's I," he went on in a bitter self-scorn, "who have prated of honor, and the conduct of gentlemen, who have made a beast of myself before the best woman who ever lived! Who through selfishness have tried to make her life a blacker ruin than I've made my own! Can you forget it, Nancy? Can you ever forgive me for it?"

"Dandie," she said softly, "ye needn't worry about that. I knew you wouldn't take me! I knew 'twas just that you were carried beyond yourself by your sorrows that made you talk as you did at the bedroom door. Look!" she said, opening the throat of the Connemara cloak and showing him the neck of her thin white dressing blouse, "one doesn't start to the Americas in clothes like that. I knew what you were and understood; knew that, given your way, you would choose the best, as you have done!" she cried, with the tears in her eyes. "Ye've stood before temptation! You've done the thing that's right when it was hard to do! and I'm proud to have seen you as I have this morning."

They were both crying by this time as they stood with hands clasped, on one side the calls of the sailors coming up the slope, on the other the echoes of a horn rolling along the frozen ground from the coach which came to carry Danvers away.

"I may kiss you before I go?" he asked, with a longing in his tone pitiable to hear.

"If ye think it's right," she answered. "If ye think that when ye look back to this time in the years to come you will be happier to remember that ye kissed me, than to think you kept the vows you swore before God, ye may kiss me if ye choose!"

The choice was made in silence, and he dropped her hands, picked up the valise which had fallen by his feet, and turned to go. At sight of this resolution Nancy burst into tears.

"Oh," she cried, "God bless you! God bless you, dear! And give you peace!" as, without touching even her hand, Danvers Carmichael fared forth alone, along the stage road which lay lonesome and frozen in the shadow of the night.

CHAPTER XXIII

A FALSE RUMOR CAUSES TROUBLE

While these events were going forward at Allan-lough I sat in an ignorant complacency at Stair, pleased with the advices of Janet's convalescence, and with no knowledge whatever of Danvers Carmichael's whereabouts save that he was from Arran Towers. My lack of knowledge concerning his movements occurred by reason of a new trouble which broke out at this time between his father and Hugh Pitcairn concerning a watercourse which crossed the adjoining lands of both, somewhere back in the country. The water was of no use to Sandy, and equally valueless to Hugh; but the fact that one of them wanted it heightened its value to the other, and talk went back and forth, with Sandy deaving my ears concerning his rights on Monday, and Hugh going over the same ground, looking the other way, on Tuesday, until I was driven from Stair and avoided both, spending my time at the clubs, the coffee-houses, or with Creech and his queer old books.

Coming down the steps of his shop on the morning of the twelfth of February—I recall the date because it was the beginning of all the troublous times at Stair—I encountered James Gordon, looking both worried and perplexed.

"John," said he, "you are the very man to help me from an embarrassing position. My wife and daughter have been taken with a fever; our town-house is small, and I have invited Borthwicke to stay with us during the meeting of the Lighthouse Commission——"

"Let me have him at Stair," I cried. "Nancy is from home, I am leading a bachelor life, and you will be showing a kindness to send me such good company as John Montrose."

In this entirely unplanned manner the duke became my visitor, and I found him a merry companion, easy, accessible, agreeable; praising my wines, naming my house the most attractive place in Scotland, and my daughter the most wonderful woman in the world; and I wandered abroad no more, but stayed at home, like a cream-fed cat by the fireside, his grace making the time gay with his tales, his wit, and his worldly wisdom. He urged me to accompany the commission to the northern coasts, and one day, when I was debating whether to join in this expedition or to go down to the West and visit Nancy, the girl settled the question for me herself by appearing at Stair, and at the first sight of her my heart sank within me. She had become much thinner, there was the pallor of sickness in her face, and a weakness both in voice and body as she clung to me, telling me her joy at seeing me again and that she would never leave me more. The news of Borthwicke's presence in the house she received with some surprise, which showed neither pleasure nor regret, going immediately to her rooms, however, making her long journey an excuse for dining alone.

It was after luncheon on the following day that old Dr. McMurtrie came into the library and addressed me, with some heat and scant apology.

"John," said he, looking at me over his glasses, "I am going to make myself disagreeable. I am going to be that damned nuisance, a candid friend; but somebody's got to speak to you, for you're just letting that girl of yours kill herself."

I stared at him in speechless wonderment.

"She's killing herself," he went on, relentlessly. "And when it's too late you'll see the truth of it. No girl's body is equal to the excitement she's had for years, ever since she was a baby, in fact, with her charities and her Burn-folking and her verse-writing. It's all damned nonsense," he summed up, succinctly, "and it's for you to stop it.

"Instead of helping her get out a second edition of poems," he went on, "ye'd show more sense if you put your mind to considering the problem of how much work a woman can do in justice to the race. Every female creature is in all probability the repository of unborn generations, and should be trained to think of that solemn fact as a man is taught to think of his country."

"Some women," I answered, testily, "are forced to work daily at laborious tasks to support families——"

"And others," he interrupted, "squeeze their feet and give each other poison; but they are not my patients, and Nancy Stair is. And I think you'll find that the women who work, as ye say, do most of it with their bodies, not with their heads or their nerves, and it's in work of this kind the trouble of female labor lies. Nancy should save her vitality. She should store it up for wifehood and motherhood. She'll be a spent woman before she has a husband, and your grandchildren puny youngsters as a resulting. Think it over, John," he concluded; "think it over."

He was scarce out of the house when Nancy appeared from the garden, coming over to the place I sat to put her hand on my shoulder.

"I'm thinking of marrying John Montrose, Jock," she said, with no introduction whatever.

"Ye have my own gentle way of breaking news to people, Little Flower," I said; and then: "Do you love him, Nancy? Or, what is more to the point, are you in love with him?"

"Neither," she responded; "but I have grown to believe in him, in spite of his past, and love may come," and here she clasped her hands together and her eyes widened with pain as she said: "I have had a great temptation, Daddy. A great temptation, and I want to put away any chance of it ever coming to me again.

I could be true to another always when I might not——"

"Nancy," I interrupted, drawing her down on my knee, "there is no greater mistake a woman can make than to think that marrying one man will help her to forget another; for there is just one thing worse than not having the man you want, and that is having the man you don't want. And if you're not in love with Montrose, you'll never get my consent to the wedding, not if he were the Prince himself."

On the morning following these talks the duke, who was still with us, sent excuses to the breakfast-room that he had passed an uneasy night and would rest until noon; and his valet, who brought this message, ended by saying:

"His grace is not well. His grace should have a doctor, for he had the bleeding from the lungs again last night, although it would be worth my place if he knew I mentioned it to your lordship."

In our foggy country a little throat trouble is no great matter, but I ordered my horse for town, meaning to get McMurtrie out, as if by accident, to see what attentions the duke might require; and riding in some haste by the Bridge end, found a group of men, with papers in their hands, discussing some bit of news with much interest. As I drew near them, Dundas waved the journal at me and called out:

"Our congratulations, John."

I reined in my horse, asking the very natural question, upon what I was to be congratulated, when Blake handed me a copy of The Lounger, indicating a certain paragraph for me to read. The notice began:

"We understand that the long-expected betrothal between his Grace of Borthwicke and Mistress Nancy Stair, only daughter of Lord Stair, is announced," the penny-a-liner going on with much wordiness to state the time and place fixed for the coming marriage, and even the shops in London from which the trousseau was to come.

"Gentlemen," I cried, "upon my honor there is not a word of truth in all of this," and, securing a copy of the miserable sheet, turned back to Stair to discover from Nancy whether to deny the announcement by direct statement or let the rumor die in silence.

I entered the house by the side door which leads to the music-room, outside of which I paused, astonished at the sound of angry and excited voices within the apartment. As I listened, wondering if some new trouble was upon us, I recognized Danvers Carmichael's tone, and almost upon the instant of this recognition, heard him cry out:

"I will save you the promising, for I swear he shall never live to marry you!"

His Grace of Borthwicke being within possible earshot of this altercation, I decided to leave Danvers to Nancy's management, and hurried up the winding stairs to hold the duke's attention until Danvers had left the house.

Looking down into the main hall as I ascended the stair I saw Hugh Pitcairn rise from a couch upon which he had been lying and cross to the far window with some suddenness of manner, and knew by instinct that he had realized the talk was not intended for his ears, and had hastily changed his position, like the man of honor that he was.

Finding that the duke had not left his apartment in my absence I crossed to my own room, where I was not alone above five minutes before Nancy joined me.

"Mr. Pitcairn is below, waiting for the

duke to affix some signatures," she said; and then:

"Danvers Carmichael has been here, too. He saw an announcement in The Lounger that I was betrothed to his Grace of Borthwicke, and came by to tell me—as you did yourself," she ended, with a smile, "that the wedding would have to take place without his approval."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MURDER

UP to this point there are many events which I have drawn with blurred edges by reason of the distance of time; but from this to the end of my story I have the pettiest details of it in mind, many of them with a horrid distinctness.

On the evening of the twenty-third the Armstrongs held a dance in honor of the marriage of their daughter Jean with one of John Graham's lads, and a number of young folks were bid to dinner before this festivity should begin, Nancy being one of the number. His Grace of Borthwicke and I were asked for the dancing, a courtesy which he declined by reason of his indisposition, as well as from the fact that he was to start for the Highlands in the morning. Almost immediately after our dinner he excused himself to me, saying that an important letter must be got off on the early post. And his breeding was shown in the fact that he allowed no doubt to remain with me that this was any invented excuse to avoid my society, for he stated to whom the epistle was destined, and the need for its immediate sending, a point of conduct which seemed to me gentlemanly in the extreme.

"It's a letter to Pitt," he said.

"Ye are great friends now, are ye not?" I asked.

"He is the nearest friend I have in all the world," he answered. "We are both rhymesters," he added with a smile. "But this letter is a business one, for I have advices from France for which he is waiting, and they must be sent in cipher because of the trouble brewing in that country. If I do not get the letter off to-night he may not receive it for a fortnight, as he accompanies his Majesty to the country on Friday."

"Why not send it by special carrier?" I asked.

"It's not important enough for that," he answered lightly, as he crossed to Nancy's writing-room, which had been given to his use as an office during her absence at Allan-lough.

Left with the evening on my hands, I set out for Creech's with no weightier purpose than to divert myself and have some merry talk over a bowl of punch; but, as I entered, Blake, who was throwing dice with Dundas at the other end of the room, called to me to ask if I had heard whether Mr. Pitcairn was better.

"Is he ill?" I asked in surprise, as it was but the morning before he was at Stair.

"He was carried from the court this afternoon," he answered, and at the words I took up my coat and started for Pitcairn's house to see if there was some help that I could offer. I found him wrapped in flannels in front of a great fire in his own chamber, in as vile a frame of mind as I have ever seen any human being, bearing his indisposition as unphilosophically as I might have done myself, and I spent a highly uncomfortable, dry, and sober evening with him, escaping from his society somewhere at the back of the midnight with a feeling of relief and the intention of getting something to drink. Going down, unattended, I pulled the house-door hard after me to close it for the night, when Pitcairn called me from the window above to ask that I stop by the chemist's and hurry along a draught for which he was waiting.

A light and tricksey snow had begun to fall while I was in the house; snow which blew in gusts, now from one side, now from another; snow which came crosswise, to be caught by the high wind and carried up to the tops of the houses; and over all and around all the fog of the sea and beaten bells sounding far away, as of ships in trouble or as warnings from the shore.

I pulled my hat over my eyes, turned the collar of my great-coat around my ears, and took to the middle of the road, looking round warily from side to side to make sure that I was followed by none, for the town had been greatly excited during this winter by statements in the public prints of mysterious disappearances. Folks had been suddenly missed from their own doorways, of whom no subsequent traces could be found; visitors entering the city were lost sight of; Irish haymakers on their road to the agricultural districts of the lowlands had disappeared from their companions as if by magic, and suspicions of a dreadful nature were abroad.*

It was a uncanny night, black as chaos;

---

* **Benson's Noted Trials.**

and with my mind excited by these horrid tales, I hurried along to the chemist's, whose man was outside putting up the shutters. I stated my errand to the doctor, who said he would carry the medicine himself, as Mr. Pitcairn's house lay on the road to another patient with whom he had promised to pass the night. This occurrence seems of small moment, and I but set it down to show how slight a thing may turn many lives, for it was this very dose of rhubarb and jalap which brought about much of the trouble toward which we were drawing.

Starting again toward Stair I came directly upon some of the town-guard, who, with flaming torches held aloft, were carrying a couple of drunken wretches to the gaol. Turning to look after them I became aware that a man had stepped from the shadow and was walking beside me, going in the same direction, but at a much quicker gait than my own. By the uncertain flare of the torches I saw that he was tall, carried himself with distinction, and, what seemed markedly strange on such a night, wore no covering whatever upon his head. I felt that he noted me not at all, and as the gloom swallowed him up, saw him throw out his hand with a significant gesture, as of one who has neither hope nor courage.

It was this motion which made my heart give a sudden leap and set it throbbing light and quick in my throat, for the belief came to me that the stranger was none other than Danvers Carmichael, though any reasonable explanation for his being abroad alone at such an hour and going toward Stair was far from clear to me. My first thought was to call out to him, but a bit of caution held me back, and upon thinking it over I made sure that my eyes and the fog had combined to deceive me, and I put the thing out of my mind altogether and hurried on toward home. Nearing the house I kept close to the high stone wall for protection against the wind, thinking to enter the grounds from the lower carriage-way, but the gates were closed, and I was forced to the main gate, the irons of which were swung far back.

As I turned into the path my eye was caught by a wide cone of light which came from the window of the room in which I had left his Grace of Borthwicke. Looking more attentively, I saw to my amazement that the window nearest the writing-table was wide open, and I thought to go directly to this place, for there was a low porch outside from which an entrance to the house could be effected. I had started across the lawn when I heard a pistol shot, followed by a pause, and then another, quick upon the heels of the first, which had seemed to come from the house. But the second, whether because of my confusion of mind or the blowing of the wind, appeared to have been somewhere behind me, and with a thought for my own safety I stepped under some frozen vines which hung above the gateway. As I did so, a small figure, coming from I know not what direction, passed through the cone of light. It ran low to the ground and light, and with incredible swiftness disappeared somewhere in the rose-garden by the south wall. Then a silence fell, and for a few seconds I stood waiting to hear a disturbance in the house, but finding naught happening I ran up the path in a preternatural hurry of spirits, and set the knocker of the main door clanging so that it might disturb the dead.

Even with all this racketing it was full five minutes before Huey MacGrath stuck his head, with a white nightcap upon it, from the attic window, holding a lighted candle high in his hand as he peered into the dark.

"I'll have ye arrestit!" he called down.

"Whist, Huey!" I cried. "It's I, the laird himself. There're burglars in the house!"

"Ye've no been drinkin'?" he shouted back, questioningly.

"Didn't ye hear the shots?" I asked.

"I heard nothing," he answered in an unconvinced manner.

"Do you want to be murdered in your bed?" I called up to him, "rather than come down to see what's going about?"

"There's just naething the matter at all," he returned. "Ye've been drinkin'. Is Rab Burns with ye?" he asked, resting his elbows imperturbably on the window-ledge.

His conduct, in my excited state, enraged me to the extent of using language which acquainted him with my wishes if not with my sobriety, and I noted him withdraw his head hastily, and the light grow bright and dim, and bright again, in his turning of the stairs, before the bars were let down and the door opened to me.

"There's just naething the matter at all," was his greeting. "Aye, ye will have been drinkin'!"

Although he carried such a brave front I saw that he had taken the precaution to bring an old blunderbuss with him, and two of the serving-men, who appeared from a rear stairway in a sleep-befuddled condition.

As we stood in the silence of the great dark hall a fear came over me that I had up-turned the house to no purpose, but underneath it lay the premonition of a great trouble, a feeling so strong that I was unable to put it by. The doors on both sides of the hall were closed, and there was no light save one small gleam which trickled from the keyhole of Nancy's writing-room. Advancing to the door I rapped boldly upon it, and waited for the duke to bid me enter; no voice answered, nor was any sound to be heard save the tick, tick, tick of a great clock that stood near. Again I beat upon the door, and called Montrose loudly by name, and with baited breath listened to the tick-ticking of the clock, and nothing else.

"He's fell asleep," Huey suggested, and upon this, thinking the door locked, I threw my weight against it, precipitating myself into the room with unnecessary violence, to find the duke sitting at the desk, his head thrown back upon the cushions, and one hand on the arm of the great chair in an attitude of peaceful slumber. But there came to me a dread of the sleep which could keep a man of his temperament unconscious while the house was being pulled about his ears. As I drew nearer to him the wind from the opened casement blew the curtains far into the room and rustled the papers on the table, the light of which was pushed back and the papers redd up, as if the business of the evening were by with.

I stepped softly to the sitting man and touched him on the shoulder, and, as I did so, fell back with a loud cry, while a voice with which I seemed to have nothing to do cried out:

"He's been murdered! He's shot! He's dead!"

I can not recall what other words this personless voice cried out, but I know that *I* stood staring at this man who but a few hours before had been so hated, feared, aye, and admired; staring at his dreadful pallor, his inhuman repose, and his inscrutable smile, as he sat before me with the blood trickling down the side of his face from a bullet-hole just over the temple.

In the first sight I had of him I knew that he was dead; the feeling of death was around him; there was death in the air, in the awful serenity of the pale face, in the hands which lay motionless and relaxed, as if surrendering all; in the faint smile, as though Death himself had come before the great man's vision and had been regarded calmly before his work was done; and while the four of us were standing, drunk with fear at this awful sight, there came to us the sound of carriage-wheels and gay voices, and before the power of action was with any of us, Nancy stood in the doorway, her eyes filled with laughter, her scarlet lips curved backward in a smile as she came forward to the place where I stood.

"Are ye giving a ball while the mistress of the house is from home?" she inquired, gayly; and, as the queerness of our actions struck her: "What is it?" she cried; and again, "What is it?"

To save her, some power of thought came back to my disordered mind.

"Come away, Nancy! Come away with

me!" I cried; but before I could reach her she had moved forward toward the dead, her head lowered, her eyes widened with terror, and at sight of the blood clapped her hands over her eyes to shut out the horrid sight, and went white, and but for me would have fallen.

The telling of this takes longer than the acting of it, for it was less than a minute before she called, with some authority in her tone:

"Send them away, Jock. Send them all away! Leave me alone with him."

I motioned the men from the room. It was the common belief that his grace was Nancy's accepted lover, and there seemed nothing strange in her request to be alone with him. As I came back she held me by the sleeve.

"Have you found anything—" she began. "Do you know of anybody?"

"Nothing has been found," I answered, and a look passed between us which told me that my dread was her own.

"Jock, darling," she went on, "stay here! but don't *see* anything you may have to tell of afterward," and a vision of the hatless man in the snow came back to me at her words.

"Fetch me some water," she went on, "and let none come in but you."

I stood holding the door ajar while the water for which she asked was being brought; but though my back was toward her I knew she made a hasty move between the open window and the desk, and as I drew near again she pointed out a pistol lying directly under the duke's left hand, at sight of which I fell back with a cry of dismay, for it was one of a brace which I had given Danvers Carmichael on his birthday two years before.

How this could have escaped my sight at the first look I had of the dead was a thing I could not understand, for it lay well in the light, and by its reflections would naturally be an object to hold the eye, and even in my confusion of mind I felt certain that it had been placed there since my first entrance to the room.

Turning to Nancy for some explanation, I found her conduct of a piece with the rest of her life, for every power of her mind was focused on present action, and there was something unnatural, beyond belief, and not like a feminine creature, in the manner with which she stood regarding each object in the room, and at sight of this self-control McMurtrie's talk came back to me.

"I will not have you here," I cried, putting my arm around her to lead her away. "It's horrible—horrible to think of such a trial for you," to which she paid no heed whatever, drawing herself from me in silence, to cross to the open window and peer out into the night.

"Thank God!" she cried, "it's snowing in clouds. It will be a foot deep by morning! But we must make an effort to search the grounds. We must seem to leave nothing undone," and the thought being conceived, it was executed on the instant.

"Why do you stand doing nothing?" she cried, throwing the door back and confronting the huddled servants. "Get your lanterns out, and the coach-lamps as well; the murderer may not be far gone. Search the carriage-way toward the town," she called twice, and even in the confusion I knew she was sending them as far from the road to Arran as she could.

Father Michel, Jamie Henderlin, and some other of the burn people had arrived by this time, but it was Nancy who thought for all of us, refusing to go to her rooms, and insisting upon taking a part in the search with us. Aside from the strain upon her, I was grateful in my soul for this determination, for laws and courts and country notwithstanding, my mind was fixed to do everything possible to prevent suspicion falling on the son of Alexander Carmichael, who, I began to fear, would be accused of a hand in the affair.

During the rest of the night, through all the talk and the searching of the grounds, there were two lines of thought in my mind, the one planning, explaining, and excusing Danvers, the other seeming to assist in present conduct and to suggest immediate courses of action.

It was Nancy herself who was first upon the little balcony of the window by which the dead man was still sitting. Father Michel, Huey MacGrath, and I followed, and going down the steps I struck my foot against some light object, kicking it far ahead of me, and on the instant Nancy sprang forward, leaned over and picked up something in the snow.

"What is it?" I cried.

She held out to me the piece of lace she had worn as a head covering to the dance—held it far out, so that all could see what it was, but made no response in words—and after the fruitless search was finished consented to go to her room. As I stood by her door, undecided whether or not to tell her of the hatless man I had met in the snow, she suddenly threw her arms wide apart and dropped unconscious at my feet. I lifted her up, wild with this new anxiety, and as I did so the lace unrolled, and from it fell a cap, with snow upon it, a man's cap with a strangely embroidered band which Nancy had worked for Danvers Carmichael the summer before. At sight of it I could have cried out as a woman does, for I knew it to be the object I had struck with my foot under the window, and the last hope for Danvers Carmichael seemed to vanish from my mind at sight of it.

Her consciousness was not long in returning, and before it came back I had wrapped the cap in the lace again, trusting her woman's wit to do the wise thing concerning it.

"Leave me alone, Jock," she said suddenly, as to my amazement she went to the wash-hand-stand, filled the basin with cold water, and dipped the whole top of her curly head into it.

"There must be no trifling with headaches to-night!" she explained. "I've others to think of than myself. Pray for me, dearest!" she cried, putting her hands on my breast and looking up pleadingly in my eyes. "Pray for your little girl, as she sits here all alone. Pray that I may have presence of mind!" and God knows the awe I felt as I saw the courage and spirit in that slim girlish body.

"Nancy," said I, for I felt that without words, we were banded together for the protection of a life dear to both of us, "with your knowledge of the law—" but before I could finish she interrupted me:

"Yesterday in my presence Danvers Carmichael threatened the duke's life not once but many times, with Pitcairn lying just outside the door. The law!" she cried. "It's not the law I'm afraid of—it's Hugh Pitcairn!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE TRIAL

The great duke lay in state in St. Giles, and the Highlands emptied themselves into Edinburgh demanding justice. The lady-mother of the dead was there, broken-hearted, and Percival Montrose, to whom the title fell; and I had a fine taste of the fealty of Gaelic-folk, for kinsfolk and clansfolk took the duke's undoing as a personal affront, and put their own matters by to get some one hanged for it.

The streets, especially those around the courts, were thronged with the late duke's following; unkempt, hot-eyed, bare-legged gillies were grouped at every corner, glowering under their tartan bonnets; I found a huddle of them squatted behind some alders on the Burnside, and came upon another set by the carriage-way, who glared at me as I passed them as if I had had some part in the undoing of their clansman.

During this time Nancy lay ill, for which, strange as it seems, I praised God, for the sickness saved her from the horrors of the coroner's inquest, McMurtrie coming to my aid in the matter by declaring it worth her life to be dragged into the affair. There was nothing more definite elicited from this tribunal, constituted largely of men under heavy obligations either to Sandy or myself, than "Death at the hands of a person or persons unknown," but the relief which came with the verdict was of short duration.

How rumor is bred none can tell, but on the day following the coroner's findings there was a waif-word wandering about that Danvers Carmichael knew more than he had told of the duke's taking off; and whether bred by servants' gossip or the talk of the fool chemist-doctor who had taken the medicine to Pitcairn on the night of the murder and encountered Danvers hatless in the snow, I can not say; but by the evening there rose a strong demand for his arrest, and two officers appeared at Arran and took the lad into custody.

Nancy, who had not left her room from that dreadful night, but who had recovered herself enough to sit up a little at a time, received the news in silence, asking if it were possible for me to get the exact testimony given before the coroner for her to see; and going through it, sitting in the bed, with flushed face and feverish eyes.

"It's not so bad," she said, as she put it aside; "not so bad. Will ye ride out and ask Mr. Pitcairn to come to me?" she asked.

"Pitcairn? Ye'll not be wanting Pitcairn," I answered. "It's Magendie we are having up from London for the defense."

"I — want — to — see — Mr. — Pitcairn," she said slowly.

"I don't understand at all," I answered. "When you refuse to see Sandy, who, in his own great distress, has never forgot you for a moment, I don't see why you should be sending for Pitcairn."

"I want to see neither Sandy nor any of the Arran people," she answered.

"And you've no word of comfort for Danvers?" I asked.

"None," she returned. "I have not one word of comfort or anything else to send to Danvers Carmichael, and I'd like to have it generally known."

Although I saw him not, I knew that Pitcairn came to Stair that afternoon; but, before God, by no message carried by me; and the following morning I visited him in his offices, finding him at a desk in the inner room looking frozenly out under his dome-like forehead in a way to suggest that his natural greeting would be: "What are you prepared to swear to?"

"Hugh," said I, "ye've doubtless heard of the trouble young Mr. Carmichael is in—" here I waited.

He nodded, as one might who had but a certain number of words given him at birth and was fearful that the supply might run out.

"It has occurred to me," I went on, "that your old friendship for me and my old friendship for Sandy being common knowledge, ye might show a fine courtesy by standing aside in the case and letting Mr. Inge take it altogether. Such a thing can be done, I know, for when the Lord-President himself had Ferrars to try, who was a known man to him, he asked to be relieved from presiding."

"I attended to the duke's affairs when he was living. I shall attend to them now that he is dead," he replied stolidly. "There is an ethical side to the matter as well, for I believe him to have been killed by the young—" he caught himself at this, with a correction. "I have my beliefs in the case," he amended. "But ye can rest by this, if a man is innocent of a crime in this country he can prove it. It is a prosecution, not a persecution, that will be conducted by the government."

And here a lighter vein seemed to take him, for he added:

"And so, Jock Stair, you would come to me to use an old friendship to buy the laddie off! Ye're a nice citizen; a fine, public-spirited body!"

"Hugh Pitcairn," I answered, "if you were in trouble, and it needed the last shilling I had in the world to help ye, you'd find me beside ye, with it held out in my hand; and it seems a little thing I am asking of you, and not for myself either——"

"Your daughter's a better man than you," he broke in on me. "It was a fine thing she did—a fine, public-spirited thing!"

"Ye've trained her well in the lawing," I said, leading him on a bit, for Nancy had held the silence of the dead concerning the murder since the day of his visit, and I had no knowledge of what he meant.

"Mark you," he said, and there was almost a glow upon his face, "the first day that she was able to sit up after her illness Nancy Stair sent for me. 'Mr. Pitcairn,' said she, 'a most unwelcome task has come to me, and I am needing your advice.' And on this she went over the talk, part of which I had overheard, between herself and the young Carmichael, with neither heat nor fallacy of emphasis, as accurately as I might have done myself," he ended, as though higher praise were inconceivable.

"There's a girl for ye!" he cried. "I've set but little store by her verse-making; or her charity work, which is sentiment; but by the lawing the very female quality of her mind has been changed, for she is able to put a duty to her country before her own feelings. Ye might take a lesson from your daughter in that, Jock Stair!" he finished.

I rode back to Stair on a gallop and went straight to Nancy's room.

"What is this ye've done?" I cried. "What is this thing that ye've done against the man who has loved ye ever since his eyes lighted upon you, and whom your own indecision has helped to the place he now stands?"

There was a look of reproach in her eyes as she sat looking up at me, but her words were quiet enough.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I've been having a talk with Pitcairn—" I began.

"For Heaven's sake!" she cried, springing to her feet. "It was the thing I wanted least. What did you tell him? Oh, what did ye tell him?" she asked excitedly.

"I told him nothing," I answered.

"You think you didn't, dearest," she answered; "but it's not in your nature to keep a secret. 'Tis because you're a fine gentleman, with never a thought in your life that needs hiding; but it's bad in law! Stay away from Hugh Pitcairn, dearest. Stay away from him!"

"Nancy," said I, and my flattered vanity softened my tone, "I don't understand your conduct at all; for, as far as I can see, you seem to have done all ye could to get Danvers Carmichael hanged——"

"Seemed, Jock," she said, "only seemed! Ye might trust me a bit more——"

"And you're called for the prosecution——"

"Naturally," she returned, unmoved.

And here I just stared at her for a minute, and turned with a bit of temper showing in my conduct and left the room.

The same evening I was further blindfolded by a visit from Mr. Magendie, the London lawyer, who by Nancy's thought (although I did not recognize her suggestion in the matter at the time, so deftly was it made) had been brought up to Edinburgh for Danvers's defense. I found this renowned gentleman of a slight, wiry build, below the medium height, with a distinguished head, covered with thick silver hair, hawk eyes, and a nose which turned downward like a beak. There was a Sabbath calm in his manner; his voice was gentle and suave, and his most pertinent statements came as mere suggestions. He had, I noticed, the very rare quality of fixing his whole attention on the one to whom he listened, and of putting his own personality somewhere aside as he held up the speaker to the strong light of a mind trained for inspection. I found after the interview that I had told him almost everything that I had said, done, or imagined since my birth, and at remembrance of it, recalled Nancy's inquiries concerning my talk with Hugh, and prayed Heaven I had not been equally indiscreet before that block of steel.

It was as the London man was leaving the house that the blindfolding of me was begun anew by Huey MacGrath entering with a note, saying that Nancy would like to have Mr. Magendie come to her sitting-room on the second floor. I paced up and down the lower hall, perplexed in mind and sick with dread of the horror hanging over us, yet with something in my heart which told me that, in spite of Hugh's statements, Nancy Stair was with us—with Sandy, and Danvers, and myself.

Near one o'clock of the morning I heard Nancy's voice, at the turn of the stair, saying good night to the London man.

"People think he's ice," she cried, and I knew it was Pitcairn of whom she spoke; "but try a bit of flattery with him. Not on his looks, for he cares less for them than for the wind that blows, but on his abilities. Tell him that all knowledge of the Scots law will end at his death, and that you're flattered to be on the same case with him; tell him that Moses but anticipated him in the Ten Commandments, and that, before the time of Leviticus, he was. He will rest calm under it. He will show naught; but in his soul he will agree with you, and think that a man who has such penetration concerning himself must have a judgment worth consideration about others."

I heard Magendie laugh aloud, and when I joined him saw that his eyes had brightened during the interview, as though he had been drinking, and that he carried himself with some excitement.

"It will be a great case, my lord! a great case!" he said, with enthusiasm. "And it's a fine daughter ye have! A great woman! God!" he cried, seizing my hand, "if she'd go on the case with me, I'd undertake the defense of Judas!—and I'd get a verdict, too!" he added, with a laugh, as he went out into the night.

On the morning set for the trial, to add to our distressed state of mind, a tempest arose. There was rain driven into the town from the hills, and rain driven into the town from the sea, and banks of leaden clouds were blown back and forth over the trees, which were bent double by the Bedlamite wind. The grounds of Stair lay like a pond, the road ran like a river, and the broken bits of trees hurled everywhere made going abroad a dangerous business. As I entered the breakfast-room Huey threw a look at my attire.

"You'll not be thinking of going out?" he demanded, rather than asked.

"I'm thinking of nothing else," said I.

"Ye'll get killt," he cried, and at the words my eyes lighted with some amazement upon his own odd costume, for he was prepared to serve my breakfast in corduroys and thigh-boots.

"Why are you dressed like that?" I inquired.

"You wouldn't be wanting me to stay at home when there's trouble to Mr. Danvers, would you?" he demanded fiercely. "I, who have known him since he was a week old, and have had favors from him thousands of times! And now," he went on as though I had done him some personal injury, "when there's sorrow by him, ye'd have me keeping the chimney-lug, wi' a glass and a story-book, mayhap, and him needing friends as he sits wi' that deevil Pitcairn glowerin' at him. Nay! Nay!" he continued, "Huey MacGrath's not like that! I'll be there!" he cried, his conceit and loyalty carrying a singular comfort to me. "I'll be there, early and late, and they'll see they have me to contend wi'!"

"Ye can't stay in the court. You'll be sequestered until after you've testified. Ye know the law for that, Huey."

"They'll sequester me none"; he returned, grimly; "and if Dunsappie the macer tries it I'll have him read out of the church, for I know of him that which makes me able to do it!"

"There's Mr. Pitcairn, who knows ye well," said I.

"I'm not counting to see him," he returned with a squinting of his eye. "I'll stay where he is nae looking; but I'll get a glyff of the laddie himsel', and he'll know I'm there, and will feel better for it, though I'm only an old serving man!"

"I'm sure he will, Huey," I said, touched to the heart; "I'm sure he will; and I'll tell him of your coming if he misses a sight of you," I added, as I saw the poor fellow's face working with sorrow and anxiety; but his spirit and loyalty undaunted by all the courts of judiciary that ever sat.

We were preparing to be off together when Nancy came down to us, pale and heavy-eyed.

"Jock," said she, "if Mr. Magendie had the word he hoped for from Father Michel, it would be wise for him to have as many Romanists in the jury as he can get. They have reason to know the priest's goodness." And then: "Jock, darling!" she cried, throwing her arms around my neck and weeping as though her heart would break, "there's a trial coming between us; and ye'll see me misjudged by the world, and by Sandy as well, who has been like an own father to me! And by him!—him, too! You'll all be ashamed of me; but when I'm called, mayhap to-morrow or the next day," and the little hands fastened themselves around my bare throat, "don't distrust me. Beloved, don't distrust me! Don't believe I'm bad, or wanting in loyalty to the dear ones of my life. Don't believe it, though ye hear me say it myself. I can abide all that's come to me, but to have something between us!" and she buried her face in my bosom, moaning like a hurt child.

"Nancy," said I, for the sight of any suffering of hers made me like a crazy man, "you've held yourself aloof from me, and have given out by your conduct that your sympathies are all for the prosecution; but in spite of it, if an angel from Heaven were to call you guilty of disloyalty to a friend I'd give him the lie, though I were damned for it!" I cried.

"Mine Jock," she said, "mine Jock!" and, comforted by the very violence of my language, she stood quietly by the window watching Huey as he waded through the river of water underneath which the road toward Edinburgh lay.

Sandy had remained in town over night to be with his boy at the earliest possible moment, and we sought him at the coffee-house where he had slept. He had his friends with him, but there were none to whom he paid attention save to me, holding my hand in his, and breathing deep in a kind of relief as I stood by him.

I asked him how Danvers bore himself, and he answered, with a courage and fortitude beyond belief, and that Magendie gave him comforting assurances. Of Nancy no word was spoken between us, for the hurt he had received from her conduct put an edge upon his suffering keener than he could bring himself to name, and there came upon me, at the sight of this pain, the impulse to tell him my own suspicions in the matter, but caution for the cause held me back.

Fierce as the morning was, the court-room was packed when we entered. I had asked and received permission to sit beside Sandy until such time as the empaneling should begin; and as we took our seats in that dread place I had a taste of the terror of the law which daunts my spirit to this day. It's one thing to read of murders by one's fireside, speculating over the evidence like a tale, and another to sit face to face with the charges and the life of one most dear dependent on the issue. And such was the awe inspired by the dreadful surroundings that when Carew, the Lord-President, in the wig and scarlet robes of criminal jurisdiction, preceded by the macers, took the bench, my body shook as though in mortal illness, from fear of the august power he represented, and this despite the fact that I'd drunken deeper than was wise with him many times in my early days and knew him to be sodden in his affection for Nancy from the time she had taken the case out of his hands for Jeanie Henderlin. When Danvers, who was by far the most composed of any of us, was brought in, I arose, laying my hand on his shoulder as we talked, determined that the whole town should know where my beliefs and sympathies lay.

There was little difficulty in getting the fifteen jurymen, and, as I was taken away to be sequestered, a thing happened which I tell for the love I have of human nature. There was a commotion at the door of the court-room, and I heard the macer's tones threatening some one, and then a clear voice crying:

"If you don't let me in I'll break every bone in your body," and Billy Deuceace, hard-ridden and disheveled, elbowed his way to the railing itself and held out both hands to Danvers.

"Couldn't get here any sooner, old man," he cried. "Have ridden all night! Just came up to say it's all damned nonsense, you know!" he finished, and I felt that a happier beginning could scarce have occurred for us.

I was not in the court-room when the case opened, and by this reason am forced for information to the papers recording the case, which forms one of the *causes célèbres* of Scottish legal history. Even at this distance of time, at sight of these old files I feel again the helplessness and miserable sinking of heart which I felt the first time I read the indictment of Pitcairn against the boy whom I loved, no matter what he had done; and I write it again, no matter what he had done.

"The trial of Danvers Carmichael for the murder of John Stewart Aglionby Montrose, Duke of Borthwicke, Ardvilarchan, and Drumblaine in the Muirs, Lord of, etc., before the Lord-President Carew, beginning Tuesday, March tenth, 1788.

Counsel for the Crown	*For the Prisoner*
Mr. Pitcairn	Mr. Magendie
Mr. Inge	Mr. Elliott
Solicitor	*Solicitor*
Mr. Caldicott	Mr. Witmer

taken in shorthand by John Gurney of London.

"After addressing the bench, the case was opened for the prosecution by Mr. Pitcairn, as follows:

"GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY:

"The crime imputed to the prisoner at the bar is that of wilful murder, effected by means and in a manner most abhorred. Such an accusation naturally excites the indignation of honest minds against the criminal. I will not endeavor to increase it, and it is your duty to resist it and to investigate and determine the case wholly upon the evidence which will be placed before you.

"On the night of the twenty-third of February, 1788, John Stewart Aglionby Montrose, Duke of Borthwicke, was found, between the hours of midnight and one of the morning, dead in a desk-chair, in a chamber on the ground floor of Stair House, near Edinburgh, by Lord Stair and his serving-men, Huey MacGrath, John Elliott, and James MacColl. The window by the late duke it will be proven was wide open, forming an easy entrance from outside; a pistol, the property of the accused, was found lying by the chair upon which the duke sat, and a wound above the temple of the deceased was discovered, made by a bullet similar to those used in the pistol before mentioned.

"It will be proven by testimony of such a character and from such a source as to render it singularly forcible, that on the morning of the day previous to the night of the murder the accused had threatened the duke's life, applying vile and scurrilous names to the deceased; repeating these threats several times and in various forms.

"It will be proven that there had existed for the accused one of the most powerful incentives to murder known, in the fact that the late duke and he loved, and had loved for some time past, the same lady, Nancy, daughter to Lord Stair; that both had addressed her in marriage, and that in September last the quarrel between them rode so high that a meeting was arranged between the late duke and the accused; and there will be testimony to show that the duel was averted by the late duke's apologizing to Mr. Carmichael, a course urged upon him by the lady herself.

"It will be proven that in October past, after a bitter quarrel with Miss Stair, the accused espoused in a hasty (and in a person of his rank and station), unseemly manner, his mother's cousin, Miss Isabel Erskine; that since that time he has been little in her presence, leaving her alone at the time when a woman most needs the comfort and support of a husband's presence, and paying marked attentions, both in public and private, to the first lady of his choice.

"It will be proven that on the day preceding the murder there was published in an Edinburgh paper called The Lounger the news that an engagement of marriage had been contracted between the late John Stewart Aglionby Montrose, Duke of Borthwicke, Muir, etc., and Mistress Nancy Stair, only daughter of John Stair, Lord of Stair and Alton in the Mearns.

"It will be proven that immediately upon reading this the accused came directly to Stair, and after entering unannounced into the room where the lady was sitting, asked her if the tale were true, calling the late duke a thiever from the poor, a seducer of women, a man drenched in all manner of villainy, and one whom he would rather see her dead than married to. That he had declared that he still loved and had always loved her, that his marriage was but the result of a crazy jealousy, and besought her to promise him that she would never marry the duke. It will be proven by two competent witnesses that upon her refusing to do this, the accused had cried out, 'I will save you the promising; for I swear he shall never live to marry you.'

"It will be proven by a physician of repute that within ten minutes of the time of the murder the accused was seen, hatless, walking very fast or running away from Stair House toward his own home of Arran, and this along a very secluded and unusual path.

"In conclusion, testimony will be brought to show that the day before the murder the accused made an agreement with a boatman of Leith to keep a boat ready for him at an hour's notice, either for Ireland or France.

"It may be urged that this testimony, even if fully established, is purely circumstantial, for that none saw the accused commit the fatal deed. To this I would answer:

"The true question is, not what is the *kind* of evidence in this cause, but what is the result of it in your minds.

"If it fail to satisfy you of the guilt of the prisoner, if your minds are not convinced, if you remain in doubt, you must acquit him, be the evidence positive or presumptive, because the law regards a man as innocent so long as any reasonable doubt of his guilt exists. But if, on the contrary, you are convinced of the fact, if there is no chance for a reasonable doubt to exist, it is imperatively your duty to yourselves, to your country, and to your God to convict, even if the evidence be wholly presumptive."

I set this extremely dry document down exactly as it is recorded in the files for two reasons: first, that it contains all of the charges against Danvers, and to show how black the case stood against him when I say that all Pitcairn said he would prove he proved to the last letter.

After my own testimony was taken, the nature of which is already known, I was granted the privilege of sitting beside Sandy and his boy, the three of us being joined daily by Billy Deuceace, whom I love to the minute of this writing for his devotion to my lad.

Nancy's appearance in court was naturally looked upon as the most exciting point of the trial, and the morning she was to be called the crowd was dense to suffocation, the court-officers busy, dashing to and fro, trying to keep some orderliness among the women, who jostled each other and gave vent to loud exclamations of annoyance in their efforts to get places from which the best view might be obtained. It is curious to note the way some trivial vexation will linger in the mind, for in recalling this scene it is the annoyance I had from Mrs. MacLeod, mine landlady of the Star and Garter, that stands out clearest in my memory of that dreadful waiting time.

She sat well to the front, giving herself important airs, and I could hear her going back and forth in whispers over the story of Nancy's visiting the duke at her house to obtain the pardon of Timothy Lapraik. Wagging her head to and fro, applying her smelling-salts vigorously, and assuming the manner of an intimate sufferer in the cause, she exasperated us to such an extent that Billy Deuceace was for throwing her out of a window.

When Nancy entered every eye in that immense throng was fixed upon her, and as she stood, so fair to see, in her black hat and gown, waiting to take the oath, Mrs. MacLeod's feelings overcame her entirely, and she cried out, in a loud voice: "Ah, the beauty! 'Tis her that should hae been a duchess!" immediately falling into strong hysterics, upon which the macers summarily ejected her, to our great satisfaction, and Billy Deuceace all but cheered.

Danvers's bearing changed at the mere sound of Nancy's name, and the look of adoration that he cast upon her as she came near him was as unwise a piece of conduct as could well be imagined, and one which would have gone far toward convincing an onlooker of his willingness to die or to murder for her protection, if necessary. The look had no weight with the one for whom it was intended, however, for she let her eyes pass over rather than encounter his, turning from him, with what might easily seem a bit of disdain, to the business in hand.

As I gazed at her I noted with astonishment that the little creature's face seemed to have taken on something of Pitcairn's expression, and from the first moment to the clear end it was toward Pitcairn she gazed, her eyes tutored by his, her passionless, unheated manner his own, her adjustments and discrimination in words showing her legal training, while he sat as a maiden schoolmistress might who listened to the reciting of a favorite pupil. As she went on with her tale; omitting nothing of the duel; dragging in details of the quarrel which seemed unnecessary; stating that for some time past

Mr. Carmichael's attentions to her had been pronounced to such an extent that she had shunned all company for fear of meeting him; damaging him in every way, as it appeared, while the poor fellow turned a piteous color, putting his hand over his eyes, and, for the first time in his great trouble, I saw his lips tremble and his body quiver with emotion. I could scarce endure the sight of this, and to show my feelings threw my arm across his shoulder, at which movement a murmur went through the crowd, no doubt at the oddity of the situation, that I should be so strongly marked on the one side and Nancy as strongly set on the other.

Danvers's conduct changed, however, before her testimony was finished, a thing which I was glad to see, for he brought himself together with fine bravery and courage, but with a bitterness showing in his face as of one who has been betrayed.

There were two things in Nancy's testimony to which I looked forward with dread. The first was the story of the cap, and the second the finding of the pistol which I was morally certain she had moved. The first of these was not mentioned at all, by which I knew that Pitcairn had had that incident concealed from him, and the pistol episode, about which I had been questioned at length, swearing that the first sight I had of the weapon was when it lay within a foot of the duke's hand, was answered like this:

Question.—"In what position was the pistol when you first saw it?"

Answer.—"I can not swear to that. My impression is that it lay with the barrel toward the window. As I pointed it out to my father, Lord Stair, I made a movement to go toward it, but he held me back, going himself to inspect it. From the distance at which I then stood it seemed to be directly under the duke's right hand, with the barrel toward the window."

It was after a full morning's hearing, during which it seemed there was nothing more she could have said for Danvers's undoing, that she was excused, to be followed by the villainous boatman, whose testimony showed all too clearly that Danvers had made ready a means of escape.

The prosecution rested with the testimony of this man, without one ray of hope for Danvers Carmichael that I could see, unless some of the jurymen were enlightened enough to refuse a conviction in a capital case on any evidence which was circumstantial or conjectural. Motive, abundant motive, had been proven; nearness to the crime at the time of the murder; the ownership of the weapon, a black spot for the defense to wipe out; and last, the means planned for an escape in case of discovery, as testified to by the boatman of Leith.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DEFENSE

On the day that Magendie took the case I had a taste of another kind of lawing than Pitcairn's, for the London man, to speak in a common phrase, oiled everybody. He poured oil over Carew; he drenched Hugh Pitcairn in it; smoothed the jury with it, and I learned to the full the legal value of the unantagonistic mind. After this he turned a light on the case from the other side, giving it an entirely different appearance, holding up the slateful of charges against Danvers, and sponging them carefully off one by one, until I was amazed at his abilities.

There were three important gentlemen, conversant with the duke's habits, to prove that the duke's lung trouble had accustomed him to fresh air, that he slept with all of his windows raised, and that it was his custom to have the window open near him, no matter what the weather. And following came Huey, with the statements that both of the pistols had been at Stair House since before Mr. Danvers's marriage, and that he had put one of them, with a new hagged flint, in the desk at which his grace was writing, within a few days of the murder. Father Michel followed, saying that Danvers had spent the evening of the murder with him, trying to persuade him to go on a sail for a few days, leaving his house about midnight in a composed and quiet frame of mind, with his cap in his hand, it being his custom to go about in all kinds of weather in that manner, a habit contracted at the English school where he was educated. And before any one could stop him, Father Michel, who I knew was tutored to the illegal conduct by Magendie, said earnestly:

"I consider it my duty to state, with no betrayal of my sacred offices, that I know, by the confessional Mr. Carmichael to be innocent of this foul deed."

Pitcairn was roaring objections in a minute, with Carew sustaining him, as was but legally decent; but it mattered little, for the jurors had heard, and I knew that the holy man's words would stick in their minds at verdict time.

Following Father Michel came two respectable serving-men from Arran, declaring that early the morning after the murder Mr. Danvers had sent them to Leith to say that he no longer wanted the boat, and that they had found its owner, the one who had testified for the prosecution, in such a state of intoxication that they could not make their errand clear, and left the message with his errand-boy, who was produced to verify the truth of their statements. And after him came Nancy Stair again, recalled for the defense, to swear to a letter sent to the duke by her the morning of the day of his demise, which read as follows:

"MY DEAR, DEAR FRIEND:

"That I love you, you know; but that I can love you with that fondness which a wife should have for a husband is forever an impossibility to me. Perhaps after a time we may be friends again. I have always admired your power. Of late I have admired your goodness as well.

"You say you will have no courage to go on without me, and I wish with all my heart I could love you as you desire, but my heart's all gone from me, and to one who never will know.

"'Courage to go on!' If I have it, can not you who are so much stronger have it as well?

"Affectionately your Friend,

"NANCY STAIR."

And after, Jamie Henderlin swore that it was he who ran across the grounds, on his way home from a wedding, and that he had heard the shots and mentioned them to his mother on his arrival at the Burnside, thus identifying the small figure I had seen running through the shaft of light, and wiping away the last black mark on the slate against Danvers.

Mr. Magendie asked permission at this point to address the court, saying that the defense had been reserved by Mr. Carmichael's wish, and that the manner of the duke's taking off had been a known thing to both of them for more than a week, but that Mr. Carmichael had stood his trial in order that every charge against him might be cleared away. And after raising public expectation to its highest, and ridiculing the idea that a man of intelligence should murder another and leave a weapon heavily marked with his own name by the side of the dead; or that because a man had uttered some threats of again challenging one whom he had already met upon the field of honor, he should be accused of being a midnight assassin, there was called the last witness for the defense:

"Lord Rothermel!"

The entrance of this distinguished statesman, whose friendship for the great Pitt kept him constantly in the public eye, caused little less than a sensation. As he took the oath, I had a near view of him; his dignified bearing, his age, and his notable integrity showing at every turn, the tones of his voice filling the court with a peculiar resonance while he deponed as follows:

"I come," he said, "as a messenger from Mr. Pitt, who regrets that his Majesty's affairs, connected with the troublous times in France, prevent his leaving London. I have his deposition, however, and the case has been fully set before me by him, so that I feel I am in a position to tell the whole truth of this disastrous affair and to set Mr. Carmichael before the world as a free man.

"There existed between Mr. Pitt and the late Duke of Borthwicke, as the world knows, a peculiar friendship. On the third morning after the duke's death there came to Mr. Pitt a packet, taken from Stair House and mailed about five of the morning upon which the duke died, directed in the duke's hand, containing three things:

"First.—The findings of the Lighthouse Commission.

"Second.—Some information from the French, a document of twenty-two pages, writ in a cipher known to but five persons in the United Kingdom, which paper alone convinced Mr. Pitt of the authenticity of the document; and last, a personal letter, the original of which Lord Rothermel begged to read before it be given to the jury:

"My ever dear Pitt:

"When you receive these papers—the last intelligences I shall ever send you—I, the writer of them, shall be no more.

"A great disappointment, one which I have not the heart to endure, together with a return of my old trouble, for I have had three bleedings from the lungs within a month, have cured me of the taste of living, and, by a mere movement of the trigger, I end the game to-night.

"It is a fancy of mine to take my leave of this earthly stay surrounded by the little dear belongings of the one I love.

"There will be much talk back and forth concerning me. I pray you bespeak me, if you will, a brave, insolent, selfish, and unscrupulous man of many villainies, some wit and foresight, a disrespecter of humanity, athirst for power, and a hater of fools; but one who, at the end, was capable of a great love for a great woman.

"I send some verses, which are of my own making to-day. As Shakespeare says, 'Ill favored, but mine own,' and so good night—a long good night.

"TO NANCY STAIR

"I stand upon the threshold going out
Into the night.
The mists of old misdeeds crowd all about
And blind my sight.

"But thro' the many worlds to come, my feet
No more shall roam.
The light from thy dear face at last my sweet
Will bring me home.

"To you always, my dear Pitt,

"Borthwicke"

I was dimly conscious of the uproar which arose in the court-room, for I was away in a by-gone time, a vision before me, clear as a picture, of a sunny room, myself at a writing-desk overlooking accounts, and a small curly haired child poring over a book on the rug at my feet.

> *"Nancy made it just like Jock's!"*
> *"Nancy made it just like Jock's!"*

I can recall the fear that seized me as the duke's letter was being examined by those familiar with his writings; the chill I felt as Blake, who knew his hand the best, was summoned to inspect it: my terror as he hesitated, with all the time that sing-song refrain going over and over in my head so loud that I was afraid that everyone in the court would hear it; and then, far away and little, like a wood-call, "Nancy made it—" And when Blake and Dundas identified the writing, and O'Sullivan, the duke's own secretary, declared that not only would he be willing to swear to his belief of the duke's hand, but to the spirit of the document as well, I put my head on the back of Danvers's chair to hide the tears which rolled down my cheeks, tears of relief, but springing from a very different cause than the one attributed for them.

There was more summing up and going back and forth, but the tension of the trial was over for all except me and one other—one wide-eyed little creature, sitting in her black gown, with Dickenson beside her, on the other side of the court-room; a slender girlish figure before whom my soul was on its knees.

I imagined her work, after she asked me to pray for her, upon that awful night. I thought of fifty things on the second, as it seemed. Visions came to me of Nancy dipping her head in the basin of water, Nancy by the mail-bag in the early dawning before the officers had come, and to that "Nancy made it just like Jock's," there came, with terror to my soul, another jumble of words—"Accessory after the fact."

I knew that the jury consulted but a few minutes before the whole of Edinburgh was shaking hands with Danvers, assuring him of their never-shaken trust in his innocence, saw Pitcairn putting his papers into the black-leather case, was conscious that Billy Deuceace was laughing as he talked to some women, with his hand on Danvers's shoulder. I say that I was aware of these things, but so remotely that they seemed part of a dream, for my real thought was to get to Nancy, to take her away, to shield her from I know not what; and leaving the Carmichael party, I made my way to the place where she was awaiting the carriage.

As we stood together near the doorway, Sandy and Danvers, with their friends, passed us on their way from the court-room, and my heart bled as I saw the look Nancy gave them, the look of pleading and affection, which Sandy avoided by talking to the one beside him; but Danvers, and none could blame him, considering his belief that she had done her utmost to get him hanged, looked full at her, his eyes showing scorn of her. I felt the slight body quiver, saw her sway back and forth for a little, and then, with a sob like a wounded child, she lost consciousness entirely. Hugh Pitcairn stayed by her until she was enough recovered for me to put her in the coach, and rode back to Stair with us, watching her all the time with an expression of alarm and tenderness, which drew him very near to me.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE MISTS ALL CLEARED AWAY

On toward midnight I was awakened by Dickenson clamoring at my door, telling me that Nancy lay delirious, with a high fever, calling for me. Making what haste I could, I reached the poor child, to find her tossing from one side of the bed to the other, uttering hoarse cries, with neither intelligence in her glance nor recognition of either my presence or my voice. McMurtrie's attitude, after his examination, drove me wild with fear. "It's like to be a long case," he said. "I want ye to get Dr. Cameron from Glasgow. I'll stay by ye," he added; "I'll just move into the house, for, under God, it's not my intention to let Nancy Stair leave us yet."

Weeks and weeks went by, during which it seemed as though I neither slept nor ate, listening to the moaning, or, what was far worse, broken talk of her work, of her cares, scraps of forgotten rhymes, bits of Latin verse, law references cited letter for letter, until I needed the doctor myself, who threatened to put me from the house unless I showed a more reasonable behavior.

On in the third week of Nancy's fever I heard that Danvers's wife was ill, but this was nature, and I gave no more thought to the matter. On the afternoon of the day on which the news was brought me the Arran folks sent again to know if Dr. McMurtrie could be spared them, and we sent him over immediately. On his return I asked him, in a perfunctory way, how he had found things, and he returned an evasive answer; but upon my insisting for the truth, he told me that Isabel had given birth to a child the night before, but that it had died before morning, and that she herself was in a most desperate state.

My heart went out to all this suffering, but death so near increased my anxiety for my own child, and when the news was brought me on the following morning that Isabel had passed away during the night, the fear for Nancy rose high in me, and I became like a crazed creature, wandering from one room to another, with half-begun prayers to God upon my lips and a feeling of utter helplessness heavy on my soul.

Nine weeks of this I endured, nine weeks of such dread that I should choose death in preference to living the time again, when one morning in early spring Dr. Cameron, who had been watching by the bedside all night, came to me. "I think, my lord," he said, "that the worst is by with. Ye need worry no more," and at the words I buried my face in my hands, as I sat at the table, and wept like a child.

On the day following this announcement, Sandy, who had refused to leave me in my great anxiety, took his boy off to visit the New Republic founded across seas, and Dr. McMurtrie, who kept his residence at Stair, for I would listen to no word of his leaving us yet, watched the dear one on her journey back from the valley of the shadow. It was late summer before she was able to be about at all, and Hallowe'en was celebrated by her first riding out.

As she grew stronger there were two changes I noted in her conduct, the first of these being her unwillingness to see Hugh Pitcairn, whose solicitude for her during her illness had knit us together by cords never to be broken. If she knew he was in the house she would retire to her own room, or if advised of his coming would go abroad to visit or drive, in every way showing a clear avoidance of his society. And the second matter was in connection with the Burn School. This work had been the chief thought of her life before her illness, but upon her recovery she refused to visit the place, would walk or ride far around by the Dead Man's Holm to avoid meeting in with either teachers or pupils; and when Father Michel brought work to her to have it examined she would overlook it listlessly, and put it by immediately on his departure, to be referred to no more. I knew more of the reasons for this conduct than she suspected, her talk in the fever being all of one thing, and the intuition of my love helping me far in discovering the truth. I believed that McMurtrie had learned some matters as well as myself, for twice, when he was telling me something concerning her, he broke off with entire irrelevancy to say: "The little deevil; the plucky little deevil!" with tears in his eyes, and ending with, "God! I'd like to tell Pitcairn," and a roar of laughter.

More than a year had gone by before her

color and brightness came back to her, and one gay spring morning, when the "Nanciness" of her had shown itself by some audacious rejoinder, I ventured on a remark, which I hoped would lead to an open talk with me, concerning the affair of the trial.

"Nancy," said I, with nothing but the impulse of the moment to guide me, "would a child of mine commit a forgery?"

She looked up at me quickly, as though to judge my intention, before she answered, "A child of yours did."

"But you were too little to know the force of your conduct then," I continued. "Would a child of mine do such a thing now?"

A curious gleam passed over her face before she answered, looking straight into my eyes as she did so, "Don't worry about that, Jock," she said; "she didn't have to!"

"We will suppose," she went on, with an exact imitation of Pitcairn, "only suppose, you understand, that a bit of evidence was needed in a certain trial to clear one who was very dear; and we will suppose, only suppose, you remember, that there was a girl who had skill enough to seem to obtain it. We will suppose, still, that the girl said to herself, 'If I am on the other side from the great Pitcairn, I shall have no chance against his cross-examination, but if I seem to be on his own side he may be thrown from his guard, and I may suggest the questioning I want followed.' Take the testimony!" she cried, in her natural voice, rising and standing by the chimney-place. "Take the testimony which I gave and go through it word by word, and you can find neither forgery nor perjury. I had been well taught in the letter of the law. I was Pitcairn's own pupil, Jock!"

It was less than a week from this time that I came in from a ride, happier than I had thought to be again in this life, when a sight met my eyes which threw me clear from my reckoning. Going past the door of Nancy's sitting-room, I looked in, and at first sight thought my eyes had deceived me, for standing in the middle of the room was Hugh Pitcairn, and Nancy's head was on his shoulder. I saw that she was crying, and that the great lawyer himself, who was far from unmoved, patted her shoulder every once in a while, saying, "There, there!" staring out of the window and blinking hard to keep the tears back.

I went on to my own chamber and sat down in a heap on the side of the bed, as I used to do at college, repeating, "Good Heavens!" over and over to myself, until interrupted in the performance by Huey, who came in to gather the fire. "Where is Mr. Pitcairn, Huey?" said I. 'He's went," he replied, and on the words a fear seized me lest Nancy should retire into one of her silences, and I should be left in a state of raging curiosity through the night. Upon inquiry I found that she was sleeping, and went down to the library, where I had but just settled myself when Hugh Pitcairn appeared before me, a legal document in his hand, having been for a walk to recover himself, I supposed. He looked more wooden than I had ever seen him, and, in the language of the country, I knew he would make me pay for the emotion he had shown before Nancy.

"I've news for you," he said.

"Hugh," I answered, "if they're pleasant, ye're welcome; but if they are not, I tell ye frankly, I've been stretched to breaking in the past year, and can not stand much more."

"It's not ill," he answered. "It concerns the death of the Duke of Borthwicke."

Here was dangerous walking for me, and I waited.

"Do you recall," he inquired, "the French woman at the Burnside who taught the Marseilles work?"

"A poor distraught body who ran from her own shadow?" said I.

He nodded.

"Although she spoke the French tongue, it seems she was Irish by birth. Her name"—he coughed a little behind his hand as though to give me time—"her name was Barnet."

I had heard the name before, but where? I saw that Hugh was waiting for me to place it, but any significant connection it might have I found myself unable to recall.

"It was heard of, ten or twelve years past, in connection with that of the late Duke of Borthwicke," he threw in for my assistance, and the tale of an old-time scandal came back to me at his words.

"She left her husband for him. They went to France together, did they not?" I asked.

"It was so stated at the time," Pitcairn answered.

"And she knows something of the duke's death?"

"Knew," Pitcairn corrected. "She died at noon to-day. It is her confession that I have in this paper, John. It was she herself who shot the duke, and the interwovenness of affairs is marked in this. She was an early love of Father Michel's, before he entered the priesthood, and came to him for work after her children died."

"Poor woman," said I, "she was half crazed, and, God forgive me for saying so, had many excuses for her act."

"Father Michel sent for me at ten. McMurtrie was there, and she told us the tale, after signing the paper, which I bring to you to use as you think best. You will be glad to have Carmichael see it, perhaps."

"Hugh," said I, for a shadow had lain between us ever since the trial, despite his devotion to Nancy, "I didn't think ye acted well by me at the time of the trial."

I got no further in this speech, for upon the instant he flew into a sudden heat, which made any temper, Sandy's or mine, or both of them put together, seem but a child's displeasure beside it.

"Acted well to ye!" he cried. "Acted well to ye! Do you know what I did for you at that time, Jock Stair, or rather for that bit lassie of yours, who has so wound herself about my heart that her illness has made me a broken man? I didn't give over the case when ye asked me, for I believed Danvers Carmichael a guilty man; but I meant to be as lenient to him as consistent with exact duty. Ye'll learn perhaps that in law, a friend prosecuting is better than a friend defending! Do you think I did not know what was done at that trial? Oh! not at the first, for she tricked and befooled me to the clear end of the prosecution; but when the letter was read I knew it had been changed, and did for that bit of a girl what the rest of the world might have tried to get me to do in vain. I was afraid for her—for her! do you understand?—for, on my soul, I thought him guilty in the way she did, a sudden duel perhaps, for the young man has a look of honesty not compatible with murder. But when I thought of what might come to her as *accessory after the fact—accessory—after—the—fact*—do you understand?—I shivered before a Scotch justice for the first time in my life.

"But the thing that galls me," he went on, and his pride spoke, "is that yon London-man, Magendie, may never know I had the truth concerning the affair. With Ferrars vs. Lorrimer, Annesly vs. Ingraham, and Cobham, Greenly, and Spencer vs. the Crown* at my tongue's end, did he think I'd let a case of resting on letter-evidence like his pass as I did without some weighty reason for my silence?

"But the queer thing of it is that I feel a better man somehow for having done my duty loosely; for, John, I had at home, when that letter was produced in court, one sent by messenger, dated a half-hour later by the duke himself, asking me to meet him the following morning to overlook some papers before he signed them, which, had I produced, would have ended the whole defense.

"She's just upset all my creeds and conduct I could no more have hurt her as she sat looking at me with those big soft eyes of hers than I could have murdered a baby. What did I tell you years agone?" he cried, turning upon me with some fierceness—"That ye can't do anything with women folks. Inherited mother instincts make them protect anything, and when it comes to one they love, they'll falsify, not knowing that they're doing it, and justify the lies by Scripture, if need be.

---

* "Famous Forgeries," Benson

"But when a man comes to die it's his mother he calls for; 'tis the touch of her hand he wants, and her breast to lean against as when he was a wee bit bairn, for he knows the worth of a heart that is all for him, right or wrong, through sickness, disgrace, and death. And in the long nights I watched by the child's bedside I learned more, Jock Stair, than any intellectual work could ever bring me, for the love I had for her, and the thought of woman's love as mother, wife, and daughter, raised me more, made me a finer man, a more uplifted one than I have ever been, even when it made me soft about my duty. It seems a bit muddled, but it's a solemn truth."

"I knew you'd find it out, Hugh Pitcairn, and you'd have known what ye've been trying to tell me years ago if you'd had a wife and children of your own. You're such a splendid fellow," I cried, "it's a pity you haven't."

"I've been wishing I had," he said simply.

"And why not?" I cried; "you're a young man yet."

He shook his head at this, but made no answer in words, and left me with some abruptness and no further speech.

Now that the confession was in my hands I knew not what course to pursue, and fell to wondering how much reviewing it might cause of the testimony which had cleared Danvers Carmichael, and what possible trouble from that might come home to Nancy's door. It was but nine o'clock; a thought seized me before I reached the house, and I sent MacColl to Arran Towers with a request that Mr. Danvers come to me immediately. It had been over a year since he had crossed my threshold, and although he was back in the country above three months, with Nancy's conduct still unexplained, friendly intercourse between the houses was impossible.

"There's a welcome been waiting for you o'er long," I said to him as he entered the room, and here the fine directness of him answered me:

"I've never had for you a thought not of the kindest; but your daughter's conduct to me, Lord Stair, has rendered—" and before he finished I put out my hand to stay him.

"I wouldn't go on if I were you, Danvers! I wouldn't say that which I might come to regret. Ye haven't known all, and ye may have misjudged," and here I began at the other end.

"The one who killed the Duke of Borthwicke has confessed the deed. I have the confession here!" I said, touching the paper I had from Hugh Pitcairn as it lay on the table.

"The one who killed the duke!" Danvers cried, in amazement. "The man confessed himself a suicide."

"Danvers," I went on, "I am afraid that letter was not written by the duke, not *all* written by the duke. It was on separate sheets, if you remember, the first one naturally without signature. It is this part which I believe to have been partly written by another."

If ever there was a mystified face it was Danvers's as he stood trying to make something of my words.

"Let me tell you the whole story," I went on, "a bit at a time, and when I bungle it in the telling stop me till ye get it clear, for the future between us is just hanging on the tale I tell.

"The night of the murder I saw ye, Danvers, going back to Stair, bareheaded, in the snow, upon what errand I knew not; and when Nancy and I went down the steps of the little porch, she picked up something and hid it in the lace of her cloak; but in her room that night, when she fainted, I saw it was your cap, all of which she held silence concerning. And the next morning I was sent off to Pitcairn to worm it from him if he had heard you threatening the duke the day before, and discovered that not only did he hear that, but knew as well, from the fool chemist, that you were seen running away from Stair on the very heels of the murder, and if a blacker case was ever set for a woman to clear away I have yet to hear of it."

"I came up from Father Michel's through your grounds, hoping to catch a sight of her by the light in the writing-room. When I was far toward home I discovered that I had lost the cap she gave me, and turned back for it, but the snow was so deep I thought it useless," Danvers explained.

Upon this I told the story, a piece at a time, going backward and forward over all that has been set down, and the effect of it upon the lad is impossible to describe. When I told of Nancy's finding his cap he put his hands over his eyes, and sat with his face covered until the clear end of the telling, when he looked up at me with a great sadness, which had joy in it as well.

"Where is she, Lord Stair; may I see her?" he asked.

"I'll go up with you and see," I answered, as I held him by the arm for a minute. "Will you be good to her?" I asked.

"Good to her!" he cried. "If she'll have me!—if the rest of my life's service can atone in any way for all the misery I've caused her—it's hers for the taking."

"God bless you," I said; "God bless and keep you both."

The door of the sitting-room stood a bit open, and I entered to find Nancy in a loose white wrapper in a great-chair by the fire.

"I've some company for you, Little Flower!" I began, and my voice choked me so that she looked at me in surprise.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"It's one who has been too long gone," I answered her, but by this time reason and convention were blown to the four winds of heaven, for at sound of that beloved voice the door was thrown open and Danvers was on his knees before her, his face buried in her hands.

"My girl!" he cried, "my girl! Can ye forgive me for all the misjudgments I made of you? Can you forget all the sorrow and misery I have brought into your life? Can you just let the past be by with and take me to your heart, for 'tis the only place I've ever known happiness or peace in all my life? I'm not worthy of you," he went on, "no man ever born was that; but say you care enough—that you think you——"

And here the woman spoke:

"Good or bad—and I think you the finest man I ever knew—worthy of me or not, I'd rather be your wife than anything this world could bring. Oh, ye've been so long away, Danvers," she said, with a sob, "so long away——"

"God!" he cried, the word sounding like a prayer, as he gathered her in his arms, kissing her lips, her eyes, her hair; and, the time being made for them, I went quietly from the room.

An hour passed, two; and when midnight was tolled, I knew that Nancy's health must be thought of, and crossed the hall to pack Danvers off home. I found him, glorified, at one side of the chimney-shelf, and Nancy, like a beautiful crumpled rose, at the other; Nancy, with eyes showing the memory of Danvers's kisses; conscious to the finger-tips, all woman, who had been learning for the past two hours from her lover's passionate caresses the Meaning of Life.

"Be off home with you, Danvers Carmichael," I cried. "Ye'll have this child of mine ill again!"

"I am not going home," he said determinedly. "She is not well, and she needs some one to sit up with her."

I laughed in his face. "With Dickenson in the next room, Joan Landy sleeping at the foot of the bed, and McMurtrie and myself across the hall, she scarce suffers from lack of attention," I answered, and here he took another course.

"Oh," he cried, "think of what I have been through—think of all the bitter days and nights of separation from her! Think how near I came to losing her altogether. Think of the hell of the last two years, and let me stay," he cried, pleadingly; and here the young rascal put his hand on my shoulder.

"Father," he cried.

The word made me wax in his hand, and I compromised. "Ye can have the rooms next to mine and stay with us to-night," I gave in.

"I shall stay till the wedding. I'm going to live here," he returned with a laugh, at which I carried him off to my own rooms, though he went back twice to Nancy's door to say something he'd forgotten.

I knew that "forgotten thing." I had gone back often to say it myself. What lover has not? But at the third announcement of his forgettings I lost patience with him.

"Danvers Carmichael! Many's the time in our college days that I have thrown your father down and sat on him to keep him from some piece of deviltry, and despite my years, I fear I'll have to treat ye the same way," I cried, upon which we ordered the pipes and some brandy, and sat till the clear day was come, talking the past over, going back and forth over our many mistakes, and making happy plans for the future, with Nancy the centre of every plan.

A month later the marriage took place in the little chapel on the Burnside, on a morning so fair and bright and joyous that it seemed made for such a happening. All the old friends were there—Janet and Hugh, Dame Dickenson and Uncle Ben, the girls from the lace-school, Jeanie Henderlin with the Lapraiks, and Huey MacGrath, who cried without intermission from the time he arose in the morning until late in the day, when, overcome by the punch, he was found asleep with his head on the Hall Bible.

Jamie played the violin, and as Nancy and I entered the church, Danvers and Billy Deuceace were waiting for us at the railing. It was such a misty, glorified, radiant Nancy I had upon my arm, that Danvers waited no longer after the first look, his impatience being such that he left Billy Deuceace, and, coming down the aisle, took her from me before we were half-way to the altar. Somewhat set back by the suddenness of this, I turned to Sandy, who was near—Sandy, with a face as glad, as overjoyed as my own—who, seeing the position I was left in, joined me, and we walked together to the altar-rail and stood shoulder to shoulder as our two children were united until God do them part.

Looking down the years to come we saw other Sandy Carmichaels and other Jock Stairs together in the bare old playground we had known; saw splendid men and women, born of our son and daughter, making the world better and stronger for our having lived, and the joy within me was so strong that the tears stood in my eyes and trembled down my face. Turning suddenly, I found Sandy as moist-eyed as myself, and while the service was being read I reached toward him, and we stood, hands gripped, until the end, in memory of our dead youth and of our friendship that could never die.

And like an old man who tells a tale limpingly, and covers the ground again to make its points clear to the listener, I set down a scene some five years later in the grounds of Stair. We were all there, Nancy and Danvers, Sandy, Pitcairn, and myself—and two Newcomers, the most spoiled and petted children, it is my belief, upon the entire earth.

"I had a letter from Pailey to-day, Nancy," said I, "proposing a third edition of your poems." *

She shook her head.

"That's by with forever, Jock; I shall never write again," she answered.

"No more verse-making?" I inquired.

"Never any more—unless it be to say to women this."

She stood, with her hands folded before her, a beautiful fulfilled Nancy, looking down at us with sweetest earnestness, her children leaning against her as she spoke.

"I should write: I, Nancy Stair-Carmichael, have learned that verse-making and verse-singing and the publicity that goes with them do not make me a finer woman; I have learned that my woman's body is not strong enough for the mental excitement of that existence, and to be a daughter, a wife and a mother, as well, and that God in his goodness sent a certain great

---

* The last published poems written by Nancy Stair Carmichael (afterward Countess of Glenmore) were:

"And will ye go Love's Way with me"—written directly after the visit to Allan-Lough—and

"Here awa! There awa! Daffy-Down-Dilly O!" one of the quaintest bits of loving child rhyme in all the Scots tongue, composed soon after the birth of her first child, Danvers Carmichael, Jr.

poet into my life to show me that gift is nothing beside womanhood.

"And I would reason with all these dear other women like this:

"Suppose I write certain verses! Where will my lines be two hundred years from now? Forgotten words of unimmediate things. But suppose my heart spoke to me, and knowing I could do but one work well, I put all childish ambition aside to become the mother of men, that centuries from now thousands of my children may be fighting for the right of present issues and hastening that Divine Outcome for which God made us all.

"And I would say to them: the night I knew another woman was to be the mother—" she paused abruptly, for she had been so carried away by her own thought as to forget where this might lead. She was a great woman, but to the end of her life could never bring herself to name the fact that Danvers had had another wife.

"That night," she continued, slurring the statement over, "I learned more about life than the classics ever taught me.

"And I would write, as well, something

about the trial, to say to them that when Danvers's life was at stake I had no thought but to save him. Right or wrong, innocent or guilty, the only thing I wanted was that he might be free.

"And by this thing I found the unfitness of women to handle public affairs, for the tender hearts, which make good wives and mothers and daughters, unfit us for the judicial conduct needed in public matters—and I'm glad they do," she finished, with a smile.

"It's not," Danvers amended, as he stood with his arm about her, "that women have not the ability to do anything they want," for he was ever chivalrous, "but that God in his wisdom gave them a great and special work, and they should be kept strong and safe and holy for its fulfilment."

"But it is not given to all women to choose what they shall do," said Sandy.

"And few of them are gifted creatures, anyhow," said Hugh.

"And one life can never be as another," said I; but the older baby, who looked up just then, said, "Mother."

"And that one word tells the whole story," cried Nancy, with a passion of tenderness in her voice, laying the child's head against her bosom.

(18)

THE END

BINDING SECT. OCT 4 - 1966

PS
2199
L6N3

Lane, Elinor (Macartney)
Nancy Stair

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY